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started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

SEPTEMBER 2005

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Cover: The Renovated Swami Vivekananda's Ancestral House and Cultural Centre; inset: Swamiji's Birthplace

उत्तिष्ठत  
जाग्रत  
प्राप्य  
वरान्निबोधत ।

# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!

Vol. 110

SEPTEMBER 2005

No. 9

## Traditional Wisdom

ŚIKṢĀ: LEARNING

बृहस्पते प्रथमं वाचो अग्रं यत् प्रैरत नामधेयं दधानाः ।  
यदेषां श्रेष्ठं यदरिप्रमासीत् प्रेणा तदेषां निहितं गुहाविः ॥

When children, O Brihaspati, giving names to objects, sent out Vak's first and earliest utterances, all (knowledge) that was excellent and spotless, treasured within their hearts, was disclosed through (Vak's) grace. (Rig Veda, 10.71.1)

आचार्यात्पादमादत्ते पादं शिष्यः स्वमेधया ।  
पादं सब्रह्मचारिभ्यः पादं कालेन विन्दति ॥

The student learns a fourth from his teacher, a fourth through his own intelligence, a fourth from his fellow pupils, and the remaining fourth in course of time (by experience).

अपूर्वः कोऽपि कोशोऽयं विद्यते तव भारति ।  
व्ययतो वृद्धिमायाति क्षयमायाति सञ्चयात् ॥

Wonderful indeed is this treasure of yours, O Bharati (goddess of learning)! It increases with expenditure and dwindles on hoarding!

यस्य नास्ति निजा प्रज्ञा केवलं तु बहुश्रुतः ।  
न स जानाति शास्त्रार्थं दर्वी सूपरसानिव ॥

He that has not cultivated his intelligence but has merely heard of many things can scarcely understand the real import of the scriptures, like the spoon that has no perception of the taste of the soup it touches. (Mahabharata, 'Sabha Parva', 54.1)

I have seen that the knowledge derived by reasoning is of quite a different kind from the knowledge derived through meditation; and quite different from this again is the Knowledge that dawns by His revelation. (Sri Ramakrishna)

There is only one purpose in the whole of life—education. (Swami Vivekananda)

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## ☪ This Month ☪

The problems with education in India are legion. Inadequate school coverage, low literacy rates, outdated teaching methods, lack of motivation for higher and continued education—all result in Indian citizens functioning much below their actual potential. The editorial, **Educating Our Children**, introduces the essays that explore some of these issues in this number.

**Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago** draws upon a poem by Eva Best, an excerpt from Pascal and editorial comments to underline the power of thought.

The Vedas, as the primary scriptures of Hinduism, are meant to govern the socio-religious norms of its body politic. Savants and scholars have regularly unravelled the various layers of meaning and insight inherent in these mantras in order to place them in the context of contemporary concerns. Swami Sunishthanandaji's **Vedic Concept of Education** is a fascinating attempt to examine the philosophical, sociological, ethical, and psychological aspects of education with a perspective provided by Vedic mantras. The author is a monastic member of Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Medinipur.

'Education is the evolving of the intellect by bringing the infinite power of the soul to act upon thought,' points out Swami Tadanandaji in **Education: Cognitive Objectives and Vedanta**. He examines the utility of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives in guiding heuristic processes as well as in assessing learning, and also points out how this hierarchy is consonant with the Vedantic idea of education as 'manifestation of the perfection already in man'. The author is Director, School of Languages, Ramakrishna Math, Hyderabad.

Learning is the essence of the endless process termed education, in both its secular and spiritual aspects. It is distinct from both literacy and schooling and is the true determinant of greatness. This is brought home elegantly in **Learning: A Lifelong Process** by Dr N V C Swamy, Dean of Academic Programmes, Swami Vivekananda Yoga Anusandhana Samsthana, Bangalore.

The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is an ambitious programme for universalizing elementary education in the 6-14 years age group. Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Coimbatore, has played a seminal role in this through its International Human Resource Development Centre (IHRDC) for the disabled, which has successfully implemented inclusive education for disabled children. **Inclusive Education** is an instructive report by Dr M N G Mani, Director, IHRDC.

Soon after Keshab Chandra Sen made known the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna to the general public, several collections of these illuminating sayings were published by various writers. Swami Chetananandaji, Minister-in-Charge, Vedanta Society of St Louis, has made available an absorbing account of these texts beginning with **The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna according to Girish Chandra Sen**.

Swami Sandarshanandaji of Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Deoghar, concludes his critique of contemporary historiography in **History, Religion and Humanity**, highlighting the impact of the personalities of Sri Krishna, Buddha and Swami Vivekananda, and the latter's own synthetic vision of history.

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# Educating Our Children

## EDITORIAL

If you happen to walk into the premises of the Ramakrishna Math at Domalguda in Hyderabad in the mornings, you are likely to see several young pre-school and primary school children of the locality grouped together merrily, having milk and snacks. If you ask them to recite a Gita shloka for you, they are likely to break into a chorus, and if you raise your voice and say 'Jay Sri Guru Maharajji ki ...' their gusty 'Jay!' may take your cheerleadership instincts by surprise.

- The Ramakrishna Mission centre in Batticaloa, Sri Lanka, runs a home for orphan children with about two hundred inmates. The ashrama is located within the 'territory' of the Tamil Tigers (LTTE). One would not be surprised if one finds the elderly swami in charge of the ashrama wending his way to the nearby LTTE camp looking for one of his minor wards who has gone missing. He would argue persuasively with the Tigers to allow his ward to go back with him and complete his education when he would be free to choose his future career. The Tigers would relent even as they would accuse him of being 'unpatriotic'.

- The Abujmarh jungles of Bastar district in Chhattisgarh are home to several Naxalite groups. Religion and traditional social hierarchies are anathema to the Naxals. If you are a teacher at one of the 'Tribal Service Centres' of Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narainpur, you may find one of the Naxals telling you to discontinue forcing the children into prayers, not teach them such self-abasing hierarchical practices as offering pranams to elders, nor organize such bourgeois functions as the hoisting of the national flag on Republic Day.

These vignettes bring into sharp focus certain very important aspects of the educational process that one is likely to overlook

while formulating educational policies and implementing them. Why should the Naxals target practices that appear rather innocuous to the ordinary observer? Why should the LTTE specifically focus on pre-teen and teenage recruits? Can the 'Jay!' of the Domalguda children provide an answer to these queries?

### The State of Our Education

In his essay 'Learning: A Lifelong Process' Prof. Swamy highlights the concept of learning as the core of the educational process and laments the failure of our conventional education system to foster genuine learning. Prof. Krishna Kumar, Director, National Council of Education, Research and Training, points out that 'the conventional textbook is a reference book, stuffed with information, offering no room to think for oneself or for interdisciplinary linkages'. He adds: 'The burden that curricula and textbooks place on children is compounded by the stress and anxiety caused by our memory-based examination system. The rate of failure is high and moderate success carries little value or meaning. The system seems designed to stigmatize the majority, ignore the diversity of potential and justify the exclusion of the marginalized.'

None of these observations are novel in themselves. Swami Vivekananda had pointed out over a hundred years ago that the system of education then current—wherein 'the mind is crammed with facts before it knows how to think'—was 'all wrong'. Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore had been critical of the colonial system of education for stifling 'social initiative and creativity'. So the problem of Indian education is essentially the problem of continuation of an unhealthy legacy despite significant attempts by govern-

ments and policy makers and motivated institutions and individuals to initiate innovations. The latest in this line of efforts is the National Curriculum Framework Review, which, according to the eminent educationist Prof. Yash Pal, aims at 'starting a freedom movement to release children from the tyrannical regime in which schools envelop them'.

Unfortunately, India's educational problems are more basic. Prof. Swamy calls attention to the distinction between *education* and *literacy*. India is home to nearly half of the world's illiterates. So the primary challenge before it is to attain universal functional literacy. The National Education Policy formulated in 1986 (and modified in 1992) recognized the National Literacy Mission, Universalization of Elementary Education and Non-formal Education as the three instruments to eradicate illiteracy.

In November 2000, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) was launched. It aimed at providing quality elementary education to all children in the 6-14 years age group through a comprehensive community-owned approach. Coimbatore district in Tamil Nadu is one of the models of success in SSA and Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya has played a key role therein. It serves as a model for integration of disabled (the Vidyalaya prefers the term 'differently abled'!) children into the educational mainstream. Dr M N G Mani's essay in this number features this success story.

The Ramakrishna Mission runs over 850 educational institutions catering to nearly 2,20,000 students. A significant proportion of this effort is directed to primary and non-formal education. Numerous other voluntary and governmental agencies contribute to the 6.64 lakh primary and 2.19 lakh upper primary schools in India. Yet the rather slow rise in the overall literacy rate (from about 20% to 65% over the last fifty years, when most South-east and East Asian countries were posting rates of over 75-80% twenty years ago) is evidence of the inadequacy of these efforts.

Two significant logistic problems are hampering efforts at total literacy: 1) the inability to enrol all children eligible for primary education, and 2) poor retention rates of students at all levels. Thus, of the nearly 200 million children in the 6-14 years age group an estimated 18% are not enrolled in any school. The school dropout rate at the primary level is close to 40% and that at the upper primary level just under 55%.

Much planning has gone into addressing these drawbacks. Swami Vivekananda's call to have the 'mountain go to Mohammed' by reaching out to people at their homes and workstations has been partially answered through the non-formal education centres. The 'midday meal' schemes are aimed at not only providing nutrition for the most underprivileged population of children but also at increasing enrolment and school retention rates. Further strategies to make primary education both an attractive and a useful proposition are the need of the hour.

### Fostering a Literate Environment

Literacy has been variously defined by linguists and social historians as 'a verbal skill involving the ability to control the visual medium of language', as 'a call for the participation of the socially deprived masses in the written heritage', or as 'an enabling factor which creates conditions conducive to linguistic innovations and imaginative creativity'. In more concrete terms, literacy has traditionally been equated with the three R's—reading, writing and arithmetic. The functional interpretations have varied between societies and over time. Thus in the most underdeveloped societies the ability to sign one's name may still suffice to pass as literate while the 1966 Adult Education Act of the US Congress adopted completion of secondary school as the criterion of functional literacy (by which criterion 25% of US citizens are illiterate!).

A concept particularly relevant to the Indian situation is that of 'environmental liter-

acy'. This refers to the 'unspecialized competence involved in generally dealing with a literate environment'. Such literacy need never be taught, just as oral language is picked up without schooling. It is the type of literacy that is acquired through participation in a literate environment in which written signs, warnings, labels, catalogues, menus, trademarks, headlines, sports scores, and the like are ubiquitous. It is a well-documented fact that the growth of 'practical literacy' in any society is more closely related to the density and richness of the literate environment than the profusion of schools.

It is therefore vitally important that not only must a literate environment be cultivated, fostered and enriched, but also special efforts need to be made to extend this richness to even remote areas of the country. The recent boom in information technology and electronic connectivity has started penetrating our villages, with concepts like *e-chaupal* having caught the imagination of the people. President Dr Abdul Kalam has given a call for 'provision of urban facilities in rural areas'. Entrepreneurs are becoming more aware of the potential for business in rural and traditionally backward areas. All these socio-economic factors provide a highly conducive atmosphere for the growth of a literate environment. Our educationists need to collaborate with and consciously exploit these forces to ensure that our rural children have at least the critical level of environmental cues that would make reading as natural as learning to speak. Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar is famed to have learnt the numerals from the milestones as he walked with his father from their village to Calcutta. Less talented children could probably do the same with a greater density of such cues.

### Intelligent Handling of Intelligence

The national curriculum review defines learning as 'the result of experience, and the student as someone who constructs knowledge while attempting to make sense of the

world'. The experiential world of most underprivileged Indian children is far removed from texts and their narratives. Even as a toddler, this child may be learning to cope with grinding poverty and crushing frustrations, emotional deprivations and abuse, an alcoholic father and an overburdened mother—all of which can severely hamper formal learning. On the other hand, a child who has learnt the skills to negotiate its way through these emotional handicaps is likely to be better equipped for life, even without any formal schooling, than many of those supposed to coach him.

The pre-school and early primary school years are most crucial for the formation of 'emotional intelligence'—the ability to recognize and handle one's emotions, to motivate oneself to persist in the face of failures and frustrations, and the skill to communicate, empathize and handle social situations effectively. It has also been amply demonstrated that emotional intelligence is a better predictor of success in life than the standard IQ, which tests only verbal and mathematical-logical ability.

The plurality of intelligences is now a well-recognized fact. The musical abilities of a vocalist, the kinaesthetic skills of athletes and gymnasts, the spatial perceptivity of artists and architects, the communicative competence of a teacher or therapist are all specific 'intelligences' that can stand out even at the pre-school level and which need to be identified and fostered at that level itself.

All the same, it is emotional intelligence that makes for harmonious human development and the constituent components of this intelligence are precisely what make for that poorly defined term 'character'. The protagonists in our vignettes were all trying to use the pliability of this emotional intelligence in children for causes they thought best. Our primary education teachers need to focus on this emotional intelligence if they are to improve enrolment and retain their students, and also make citizens with character. ~



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# Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago

September 1905

Feeling is like soil. Germs are no more inherent in the one than in the other. As by careful cultivation a piece of ground can be freed from the seeds of all obnoxious growths, in the same way can a man rid his feeling of the germs of all undesirable emotions. A habit, an emotion, or an impulse is only a specialised form of the raw material feeling. The cultivation or education of feeling consists in producing those specialised forms of it which are desirable and killing out those that are undesirable. A form of feeling is individualised and strengthened in proportion to the intensity with which it is called out and the number of times it is repeated. Conversely, it is weakened and dis-individualised ... the more it is neglected and the more it is crowded out by forms of an opposite character. Thought is the agency which not only creates a form of feeling, but sustains it. Thinking of a thing outlines a form in the feeling-stuff. This is the germ. Fed by thought the germ develops into desire and the rest of the series. Deprived of thought it dwindles and dies. A desire cannot exist long if it is not thought upon. The form cut off from its supply of life soon disintegrates.

—from ‘Occasional Notes’

## The Power of Thought

Think beautiful thoughts, and set them adrift  
On Eternity's boundless sea!  
Let their burdens be pure, let their white sails lift  
And bear away from you the comforting gift  
Of your heart-felt sympathy.  
For a beautiful thought is a beautiful thing,  
And out on the infinite tide  
May meet, and touch, and tenderly bring  
To the sick and the weary and the sorrowing  
A solace so long denied.  
And a soul that hath buffeted every wave  
Adversity's sea hath known,  
So weak, so wan, so despairing, grows brave  
With that beautiful thought to succour and  
save—  
The thought it has made its own.

And the dull earth-senses shall hear its cry,  
And the dull eyes see its gleam,  
And the ship-wrecked hearts, as they wander by,  
Shall catch at its promise, and straightway try  
To wake from their dismal dream.  
And radiant now as a heavenly star,  
It grows with its added good,  
Till over the waters the light gleams far  
To where the desolate places are,  
And its lessons are understood.  
And glad are the eyes that behold the ray,  
And glad are the years that hear  
The message your sweet thought has to say  
To the sorrowing souls along the way,  
Who needed its word of cheer.

—Eva Best

Man is but a reed, weakest in nature, but a reed which thinks. It needs not that the whole universe should arm to crush him. A vapour, a drop of water is enough to kill him. But were the Universe to crush him, man would still be more noble than that which has slain him, because he knows that he dies, and the Universe has the better of him. The Universe knows nothing of this.

Not from space must I seek my dignity, but from the ruling of my thought. I have should no more if I possessed whole worlds. By space the Universe encompasses and swallows me as an atom, by thought I encompass it.

—Pascal



# Vedic Concept of Education

SWAMI SUNISHTHANANDA

## Introduction

The Vedas, like any other scripture, are eternal inspirers. They inspire us to lead higher lives. Even if we were to suppose that they may not create an urge towards a greater, nobler life, just the fact that their words have come up from the depths of man's own nature enables them to furnish a channel, a framework, in which idealism can become operative for the welfare of humanity. Hence this attempt to interpret various aspects of education based on the teachings of the Vedas.

## Educational Philosophy of the Vedas

A teacher should have faith in the inherent potentialities of each and every student, for the Atman (Self) is lodged in the heart of every creature:

आत्माऽस्य जन्तोर्निहितो गुहायाम् ।<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, he should be able to recognize the differences in their capacity of assimilation owing to diverse backgrounds, as has been aptly pointed out:

अक्षण्वन्तः कर्णवन्तः सखायो मनोजवेष्वासमा बभूवुः ।

Though all men have the same eyes and ears, yet they are unequal in their intellectual capacities.<sup>2</sup>

Accordingly, a teacher should be able to act as a resource person for all students by catering to the students' diverse needs. This is possible if the teacher has love for knowledge. A teacher should read new books, acquire new dimensions of knowledge, become enriched with new ideas. And this capacity to acquire knowledge must be combined with the capacity to communicate knowledge to others. In the words of the Vedas:

स्वाध्यायप्रवचनाभ्यां न प्रमदितव्यम् ।

Do not forsake learning and teaching.<sup>3</sup>

An ideal teacher is supposed to be a friend, philosopher and guide. His intellectual egotism does not lead him to reject or discourage students' opinions altogether. Rather, his loving attitude towards students motivates him to be interactive in the classroom. He questions his students and encourages them to express their opinions. Questions serve an important purpose. They stimulate the students to think, and thus serve as an effective way of animating their minds. In turn, the viewpoints of the students can stimulate new lines of thought in the teacher and offer him new insights. To teach is to learn. Hence, the ideal teaching-learning process is not a one-way traffic. It is intended for the welfare of both teacher and student. The following Vedic invocation is aimed at making the teaching-learning process fruitful, by being an effective means to nurture the intellect of both the teacher and the student, so that they may succeed in their joint venture to explore the sublime and wider horizons of their mental and spiritual faculties:

ॐ सह नाववतु । सह नौ भुनक्तु । सह वीर्यं करवावहै ।  
तेजस्वि नावधीतमस्तु मा विद्विषावहै ।

ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

Om. May [He] protect us both. May [Brahman] bestow upon us both the fruit of knowledge. May we both obtain energy to acquire knowledge. May what we both study reveal the Truth. May we cherish no evil feeling towards each other. Om Peace! Peace! Peace!<sup>4</sup>

In an ideal educational process, a teacher is supposed to be a father figure, a role model. In the Vedic times, the teacher was usually a guru, who was no ordinary person, but a rishi, a seer. Knowledge flourished in him more through his inner vision than through outer

experience, though the latter process was considered in no way inferior to the former. A student was supposed to live in the company of those heroes who sublimated life and conquered death, because it is life that kindles life. There is a Vedic injunction:

आयुषायुःकृतां जीवायुष्मान् जीव मा मृथाः ।  
प्राणेनात्मन्वतां जीव मा मृत्योरुदगा वशम् ॥

‘Live with the enlightened sages who ennoble life. Live the life of an enlightened man, die not. Live with the spirit of elevated souls; come not into the clutches of death.’<sup>5</sup>

Lethargy and complacency are the greatest hindrances in the process of learning. There is no end to learning. As Sri Ramakrishna used to say, ‘As long as I live, so long do I learn.’ He who seeks new knowledge exalts himself. It is the duty of man to move ahead in quest of knowledge:

आरोहणमाक्रमणं जीवतो जीवतोऽयनम् ।

‘To ascend and march ahead is the path of progress’ (5.30.7).

भृत्यै जागरणमभृत्यै स्वपनम् ।

Awakening is life, slumbering is death.’<sup>6</sup>

Being not contented with the existing position, a person should put forth efforts to lift himself higher and higher. Hence the Vedas inspire us:

उत् क्रामातः पुरुष माव पथाः ।

‘O man, rise from the present position; do not fall down.’<sup>7</sup>

Again, in the process of continuous learning, regular study is of great importance. However, one must be cautious about the choice of books. Only those books which purify the senses and mind, enhance intellectual and spiritual power, and inspire a person to do noble deeds can be considered good. Hence the Vedas prescribe this:

यः पावमानीरध्येत्यृषिभिः सम्भृतां रसम् ।

सर्वं स पतमश्नाति स्वदितं मातरिश्चना ॥

‘He who studies books of divine knowledge—books that purify all beings, books that have been preserved by the enlightened sages and seers—enjoys celestial bliss, attains purity and piety.’<sup>8</sup>

## Vedic Code of Ethics

Character building is the main objective of education. Here again lies the responsibility of an ideal teacher. According to the Vedas, the best teachers are those who not only teach but also make their pupils worthy citizens possessing noble virtues.

Vedic students were taught to respect their elders, namely, father, mother, teachers and guests. But to respect elders did not mean to imitate them or follow them blindly. They were to respect their elders, but at the same time they were to discriminate the ennobling features of their elders’ character from those that were unsophisticated. The gurus or teachers of Vedic tradition used to instruct their students at the time of convocation:

मातृदेवो भव । पितृदेवो भव ।

आचार्यदेवो भव । अतिथिदेवो भव ॥

यान्यनवद्यानि कर्माणि । तानि सेवितव्यानि ।

नो इतराणि ॥

यान्यस्माकं सुचरितानि । तानि त्वयोपास्यानि ।

नो इतराणि ॥

‘Let your mother be a goddess unto you. Let your father be a god unto you. Let your teacher be a god unto you. The works that are not blameworthy are to be resorted to, not the others. Those actions of ours that are commendable are to be followed by you, not the others.’<sup>9</sup>

All our day-to-day dealings are based upon faith in others. If individuals turn out to be untruthful, the entire social system will collapse. Hence truthfulness is the foundation of human life. In the words of the Vedas:

सत्येनोच्चिता भूमिः ।

‘The earth is sustained through Truth.’<sup>10</sup>

Thus, one of the vital aspects of education is to train the young to be truthful. As per the Vedic dictum:

ऋतस्य पथा प्रेत ।

‘Tread on the path of truth.’<sup>11</sup>

ऋतस्य पन्थामनु पश्य साध्वङ्गिरसः सुकृतो येन

यन्ति ।

‘Observe minutely the path of truth which has been trodden by the enlightened

sages.<sup>12</sup>

The Vedas further assert that:

ऋतस्य गोपा न दभाय सुक्रतुः ।

The noble soul who pursues the path of truth is never defeated.<sup>13</sup>

Truthfulness, in order to be a virtue, must not hurt or injure others. The purpose of truthfulness is welfare of others. When such a purpose is not served, it is wise to remain silent. What is true must be good and what is good must be true. Hence, according to the Vedas, one should aspire for sweetness of speech, which ensures peace and prosperity:

जिह्वाया अग्रे मधु मे जिह्वामूले मधूलकम् ।

May there be sweetness in front of my tongue; may the root of my tongue be replete with honey.<sup>14</sup>

वाचा वदामि मधुमदम् ।

May I use sweet words in my speech' (1.34.3).

A student should not engage himself in criticizing others, giving little importance to what he himself is doing. Criticizing others ultimately injures the criticizer, for it is the criticizer whose mind gets contaminated by perceiving evil in others. Hence the Vedas warn us:

निन्दितारो निन्द्यासो भवन्तु ।

Those who defame others are themselves defamed.<sup>15</sup>

True education should train individuals to be honest in their dealings. Like truthfulness, honesty is also a vital factor which ensures social stability. To be precise, honesty is also a form of truthfulness. Hence the Vedas enjoin on human beings to earn wealth by dint of honest labour:

या मा लक्ष्मीः पतयालूरजुष्टाऽ-

भिचस्कन्द वन्दनेव वृक्षम् ।

अन्यत्रास्मत् सवितस्तामितो धा

हिरण्यहस्तो वसु नो रराणः ॥

'O God, keep away from me that wealth which degrades me, which entangles me from all directions and withers me like a parasitic plant that withers away the tree. O supreme Lord of wealth, thy hands are golden. Bless me

with that wealth which gives me peace and joy.'<sup>16</sup>

The Vedas instruct man to endeavour to acquire the wealth which legitimately belongs to him and not covet others' property.

मा गृधः कस्य स्विद्वनम् ।

'Do not covet the wealth of others.'<sup>17</sup>

Education should equip one with a rational and scientific attitude. The Vedic Pashu Yaga mantras, though addressed to the sacrificial animal, could well inspire us to explore new horizons in quest of knowledge.

समुद्रं गच्छ स्वाहाऽन्तरिक्षं गच्छ स्वाहा ।

'Explore the ocean, explore the sky and be blessed' (6.21).

Adversity brings the opportunity to test our strength and discover for ourselves the stuff of which we are made. The Vedas teach us that our resolutions should be firm enough to encounter all our adversities bravely. The more we try to run away from adversities, the more they will follow us. The only solution is to stop and face the brutes, boldly. Bravery alone can lead us to success.

ध्रुवस्तिष्ठाविचाचलिः ।

Be firm and unshaken.<sup>18</sup>

सबलो अनपच्युतः ।

(May our speech be) strong and invincible.<sup>19</sup>

## Educational Sociology of the Vedas

Being citizens of a free nation, students should be made aware of the fact that we shall have to solve national problems and reshape the destiny of India according to our national ideas, ideals and needs. Mere freedom from the shackles of foreign rule is not enough. The process of education should stimulate students to get firmly convinced that indigenous problems can never be solved with imported ideologies, especially for a nation which has its own enriched and highly evolved cultural and spiritual heritage. The Vedas urge us to endeavour for self-rule:

यतेमहि स्वराज्ये ।

May we endeavour for self-rule.<sup>20</sup>

Students need to develop a sense of national loyalty and responsibility. This sense of national loyalty can be cultivated by following the Vedic attitude towards one's motherland:

माता भूमिः पुत्रो अहं पृथिव्याः ।  
Earth is my mother, I am a son of the soil.<sup>21</sup>

The Vedas remind us that our sense of national responsibility should instil in us an urge to serve our motherland and to be willing to sacrifice all for her security and welfare.

उप सर्प मातरं भूमिम् ।  
Serve thy motherland.<sup>22</sup>

वयं तुभ्यं बलिहृतः स्याम ।  
(O Motherland,) may we sacrifice all for thee.<sup>23</sup>

Students must be educated to recognize unity in diversity, for that is a distinctive feature of our motherland which has enabled her to remain integrated in terms of the social, cultural and spiritual aspects of evolution, centuries after centuries, ultimately to get metamorphosed into a symphony of diverse traditions. Even the Vedas echo this ennobling aspect of our motherland:

असंवाधं मध्यतो मानवानां  
यस्या उद्धतः प्रवतः समं बहु ।  
नानावीर्या ओषधीर्या बिभर्ति  
पृथिवी नः प्रथतां राध्यतां नः ॥  
'May the Earth, which has many heights, slopes and plains, bearing on her bosom herbs that possess healing powers, bind together scattered men of diverse natures' (12.1.2).

Recognizing unity in diversity, the Vedas advise all to live in peaceful coexistence.

जीवा स्थ जीव्यासम् ।  
'You may live and let me also live' (19.69.1).

Students should be made aware of the fact that the basic hindrance in the path of national progress is people's excessive stress on individual freedom and also on the rights resulting from it, without caring to stress the importance of social responsibility and the duties ensuing therefrom. If the students realized their responsibility to their nation, they would

work more efficiently and with greater dedication, thereby promoting the development of their own nation. Rights and duties should go hand in hand, like the shield and sword of the Vedic Maruts:

हस्तेषु खादिश्च कृतिश्च सं दधे ।  
They [the Maruts] wielded the shield and sword in their hands.<sup>24</sup>

True education should aim at imparting a humanistic attitude and the spirit of service. The Vedas censure the self-centred man whose accomplishments are aimed exclusively at selfish ends:

मोघमन्नं विन्दते अप्रचेताः  
सत्यं ब्रवीमि वध इत्स तस्य ।  
नार्यमणं पुष्यति नो सखायं  
केवलाघो भवति केवलादी ॥  
'The small-hearted man procures food in vain. I speak the truth—this verily is his death. He cherishes neither god nor friend; he who eats alone, eats sin alone' (10.117.6).

In turn, the Vedas inspire one to be charitable. The sole purpose of earning should be to spend money on charitable acts.

शतहस्त समाहर सहस्रहस्त सं किर ।  
Earn with a hundred hands and distribute with a thousand.<sup>25</sup>

करो यत्र वरिवो बाधिताय ।  
Blessed are the hands that support the destitute.<sup>26</sup>

Education should enable an individual to transcend his individuality in conscious social participation.

मा भ्राता भ्रातरं द्विषतु ।  
May not brother despise brother.<sup>27</sup>

Instead of being jealous of each other, clashing with each other and pulling each other down, true education should enable a person to develop the capacity to cooperate, to live and work as a team. The Vedas urge upon men to assemble on a common platform, to think together, and to work together for achieving a common goal.

सं गच्छध्वं सं वदध्वं सं वो मनांसि जानताम् ।  
देवा भागं यथा पूर्वं सज्जानाना उपासते ॥  
समानो मन्त्रः समितिः समानी

समानं मनः सह चित्तमेषाम् ।

समानं मन्त्रमभि मन्त्रये वः

समानेन वो हविषा जुहोमि ॥

समानी व आकूतिः समाना हृदयानि वः ।

समानमस्तु वो मनो यथा वः सुसहासति ॥

March together; let your words be united; let your minds be united; accept your share of fortune just as the gods, concurring, accepted their portion of the sacrifice in ancient times. May your prayers be common; common be your fraternity; may your minds move with one accord; may your hearts work in harmony for one goal; may you be inspired by a common ideal; I offer for you a common oblation. May you resolve with one accord, may your hearts beat in unison; may your thoughts be harmonious, so that you may live together in happiness.<sup>28</sup>

In a democracy, it is the responsibility of the citizens to elect their representatives, who on behalf of the people will look after the security and welfare of the nation. Hence education has a vital role to play in a democracy. The general masses should be sufficiently educated to be aware of the responsibilities of their representatives in the process of running the administration of the nation. The mantras of the Purushamedha and Vajapeya Yagas mention the responsibilities of a ruler and suggest that the ruler is invested with power for the welfare of the people:

क्षत्राय राजन्यम् ।

The ruler is for protection.<sup>29</sup>

कृष्यै त्वा क्षेमाय त्वा रक्ष्यै त्वा पोषाय त्वा ।

For growth of agriculture, for protection of property, for progress and prosperity, for support and sustenance (are you appointed as our ruler)' (9.22).

Freedom is our birthright. Education should make one aware of the various forms of exploitation, so that one can fight for liberty and for the right to live with dignity. It is natural that social life will have various gradations depending on the diversity of people's cultural background, economic status, learning, profession and accomplishments. But that

does not imply that a certain section of society should have the privilege to exploit other sections. Society should ensure liberty to each and every person to lead a life free from all sorts of exploitation, as has been voiced in the Vedas:

अदीनाः स्याम शरदः शतम् ।

'May we live a hundred years without being slaves to others' (36.24).

Education alone is the panacea for all social evils. Hence the Vedas call upon the scholars to aryanize the whole world. Arya means refined, cultured and civilized, and to aryanize means to ennoble. Peace and prosperity will prevail on earth when most of the people are aryanized. The Vedas ordain:

कृण्वन्तो विश्वमार्यम् ।

'Making all our acts noble.'<sup>30</sup>

उत् देवा अवहितं देवा उन्नयथा पुनः ।

'You gods have degraded us; you must raise us up again' (10.137.1).

The Vedas adore the enlightened persons who dedicate their lives for leading others towards progress by annihilating the darkness of superstition, ignorance, illiteracy and narrow outlook prevailing among the common masses:

ते हि पुत्रासो अदितेः प्रजीवसे मर्त्याय ।

ज्योतिर्यच्छन्त्यजसम् ॥

They are worthy sons of the soil who impart everlasting light for the good of human life.<sup>31</sup>

### Educational Psychology of the Vedas

All deeds originate from thoughts. Pure thoughts result in constructive deeds, while impure thoughts result in destructive acts. Man is made by what he thinks. Hence true education, as per the Vedas, is to develop a pure mind, to cultivate virtues and to entertain good wishes for all beings of the world, as is evident from the following mantras:

यज्ञाग्रतो दूरमुदैति देवं

तद् सुप्तस्य तथैवेति ।

दूरङ्गमं ज्योतिषां ज्योतिरेकं

तन्मे मनः शिवसङ्कल्पमस्तु ॥

'This mind of mine, which travels afar, the light of lights, which wanders to far-off places whether I am asleep or awake—may it resolve to do what is good and pure' (34.1).

भद्रं नो अपि वातय मनः ।  
(O Agni,) lead our minds on virtuous paths.<sup>32</sup>

आ नो भद्राः क्रतवो यन्तु विश्वतः ।  
'Let noble thoughts come to us from all sides' (1.89.1).

The very essence of education is concentration of the mind. It is the nature of the mind to fluctuate at each and every moment. When one tries to acquire knowledge about an object, the mind, being constantly fluctuant, cannot focus on it fully. Thus the knowledge acquired is superficial. But if a man can be trained to concentrate his mind, thereby enabling him to focus uninterruptedly on the object of knowledge, then the knowledge acquired by him will be all-comprehensive. The distractions of the mind are related either to one's past action or future anticipation. If these two types of mental gyrations can be stopped, and the mind can be trained to remain focused on its present assignment, then alone can the knowledge acquired by the mind be all-comprehensive and fruitful. Hence the Vedas say:

यत्ने भूतं च भव्यं च मनो जगाम दूरकम् ।  
तत्तु आ वर्तयामसीह क्षयाय जीवसे ॥  
'The mind has gone far away to all that occurred in the past and will occur in the future. We call it back to thyself so that it may remain long under thy control' (10.58.12).

However, according to the Vedas, purification and concentration of the mind are not merely intended for acquiring objective knowledge, but for cultivating subjective knowledge too, which leads man to evolve consciously beyond his psychophysical existence so that he may ultimately realize his immortal spiritual nature. Education, love for the country and truthfulness are all highlighted in the Vedas. But their central theme is the removal of ignorance and suffering.

Though the Vedas teach everything else, as we saw above, they always underscore the need to realize one's immortal spiritual nature, which alone leads to supreme peace. In the depths of such realization is true wisdom born, which has little relation to the surface activities of the enquiring intellect. True education, according to the Vedas, should motivate us to comprehend that life is a great and deep personal adventure, offering us continued and unlimited opportunities to open ourselves more and more fully to that infinite immortal Reality of which we form an integral part:

विद्ययाऽमृतमश्नुते ।  
Knowledge leads us to immortality.<sup>33</sup>

Closing our minds and hearts to life, truth, beauty and love cuts off the effulgence of our being. Hence the Vedas urge us to pray for illumination so that, instead of groping in darkness, we may proceed towards light:

गृह्णातु गुह्यं तमो वि यात विश्वमत्रिणम् ।  
ज्योतिष्कर्ता यदुश्मसि ॥  
Dispel horrid darkness from within; remove all vicious thoughts and enkindle the light we long for.<sup>34</sup>

असतो मा सद्गमय ।  
तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय ।  
मृत्योर्माऽमृतं गमय ॥  
Lead us from untruth to truth, from darkness to light; from death to immortality.<sup>35</sup>

## Conclusion

Though the educational process, as discussed in the light of the Vedas, lays stress on self-discipline, it does not deal with life pessimistically. The main objective of self-discipline is to overhaul human personality and initiate us in the art of living so that we can live the full span of our lives in quest of knowledge, peace and prosperity:

पश्येम शरदः शतम् । जीवेम शरदः शतम् ।  
बुध्येम शरदः शतम् । रोहेम शरदः शतम् ।  
पूषेम शरदः शतम् । भवेम शरदः शतम् ।  
भूयेम शरदः शतम् । भूयासीः शरदः शतात् ॥



'May we see for a hundred autumns. May we live for a hundred autumns. May we know for a hundred autumns. May we rise for a hundred autumns. May we prosper for a hundred autumns. May we live for a hundred autumns. May we grow for a hundred autumns—even more than a hundred autumns.'<sup>36</sup>

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## Power of Understanding

ऋचो अक्षरे परमे व्योमन् यस्मिन् देवा अधि विश्वे निषेदुः ।  
यस्तन्न वेद किमुचा करिष्यति य इत् तद् विदुस्त इमे समासते ॥

He who does not realize the ultimate Truth behind the *Rik* and *Akshara* (word and letter) in which rest all gods—what will he do by merely reciting and repeating the *Riks*? (*Rig Veda*, 1.164.39)

उत त्वः पश्यन् न ददर्श वाचमुत त्वः शृण्वन् न शृणोत्येनाम् । उतो त्वस्मै तन्वं वि सस्त्रे जायेव पत्य उशती सुवासाः ॥

One (student) merely sees the word but not its meaning; another hears it but not fully. But to another (worthy pupil) it unfolds itself like the devoted wife appearing in her best dress before her husband. (*Rig Veda*, 10.71.4)

उत त्वं सख्ये स्थिरपीतमाहुर्नैनं हिन्वन्त्यपि वाजिनेषु । अधेन्वा चरति माययैष वाचं शुश्रुवाँ अफलामपुष्पाम् ॥

He who is established and has drunk in supreme knowledge is counted as indispensable in the assemblies of the learned. Another wanders with an illusion that is but a barren cow—the mere symbol of speech, bearing no fruit or flower. (*Rig Veda*, 10.71.5)

यद्गृहीतमविज्ञातं निगदेनैव शब्दते । अनग्नाविव शुष्कैधो न तज्ज्वलति कर्हिचित् ॥

Learning without understanding is called cramming; like dry wood on ashes it can never blaze forth. (*Nirukta*, 1.18)



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# Education: Cognitive Objectives and Vedanta

SWAMI TADANANDA

## The Challenges Before Us in Education

In this age of information explosion, accommodating the humongous amounts of information and knowledge in every field is putting severe strain on all involved with education—students, teachers and parents. A look at the syllabus at any level of education in India reveals that students nowadays are exposed to far more information than their fathers or grandfathers were. This is resulting in parents investing in the education of their children right from the nursery level. To secure a place in a good college, students have to take additional coaching and outperform others in competitive examinations. Even while in college, a student must learn other subjects such as computing or an additional language. Gone are the days when a single educational qualification could secure you a lifetime of comfortable employment. There is continuous pressure to specialize and constantly stay updated and upgraded in one's specialized field. With greater connectivity at all levels of our society and increasing complexity in our lifestyle, the situation has only worsened.

The simplistic idea of education characteristic of our system, primarily based on feeding in chunks of information, does not sufficiently prepare our younger generations to brace themselves for the challenges that lie ahead of them. Firstly, we must admit that there is very little we can do to reduce or even control the quantity of information and knowledge that our students have to handle. Furthermore, we must realize that an education system restricting itself to imparting only factual knowledge is outdated. Man is distinguished from animals by virtue of his rationality. It is this thinking domain of his personality that calls for careful formation. The intellect is

to be trained to distinguish truth from error, facts from opinions, and reality from appearance. The common idea of education and its methodology need to be reviewed.

## A Paradigm Shift

A paradigm shift is necessary in the objectives and methodology of our current education—a major shift from 'quantity of information' to 'quality of training of the mind and intellect', which will make them efficient instruments for not only processing and assimilating vast amounts of information but also facing situations of increasing complexity in everyday life.

True education encompasses many areas related to the harmonious development of the three H's—head, heart and hands. This article is restricted to the development of the cognitive or thinking domain of learners.

About a century ago, Swami Vivekananda had predicted this crisis in education and had categorically pointed out that real education is not the amount of information that is put into one's brain and runs riot there, undigested, all one's life. The human mind is not a bottomless dry well which has to be filled in with buckets of information by the teacher. A critical evaluation of the objectives of our current educational system shows that in reality they are exactly what Swami Vivekananda did *not* want. He had also said that education has more to do with assimilation of ideas and developing 'a mind of the same material as that of which the thunderbolt is made'. He had envisioned an education that increased the strength of the mind, expanded the intellect and enabled one to stand on one's own feet; and this, he suggested, was to be done with the help of 'Western science coupled with

Vedanta ... and faith in one's own Self'.

Taking this as the starting point, we shall first explore how the scientific approach to education adopted in the West can help us achieve the goal of upgrading the cognitive faculty of learners. Then we will see how the application of the wonderful Vedantic idea of real education being 'the manifestation of the perfection already in man' can enhance education by bringing out a novel transformation in our faith in ourselves and in our approach to teaching and learning.

### What Is Assimilation of Ideas?

The *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines the verb *assimilate* as 'to fully understand an idea or some information so that you are able to use it yourself'. Since ideas may be likened to 'food for the mind', let us understand this intellectual process of assimilation of ideas by drawing a parallel with the physiological process of assimilating food.

Food is processed in the digestive tract in a very organized manner. The mouth is responsible for moistening and initial physical breakdown of the food. Then in the stomach and duodenum strong acids and enzymes break down the carbohydrates, proteins, and fats into sugars, amino acids, and fatty acids. The process of assimilation or absorption takes place in the small intestine. Here the essential digested nutrients in the form of sugars, amino acids, fatty acids and some re-synthesized fats are absorbed into the bloodstream and transported to various organs of the body. The nutrients are then burnt through the complex process of cellular respiration to release energy, or used for the synthesis of various tissues such as muscle, skin, hair and the like, or stored as fat for future use. The whole process involves the successive stages of ingestion, digestion, and assimilation, culminating in cellular respiration and growth of cells and tissues. Undigested waste travels to the large intestine on its way out to make space for newer, more effective nutrients.

A strong and healthy digestive system is necessary to fully process the food we eat. Likewise, a well-developed cognitive system is necessary to efficiently process information, ideas and concepts. Irrelevant ideas and information have to be discarded.

Our education system can benefit greatly from the well established and applied Western concept known as Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives for the cognitive domain which was formulated by Dr Benjamin Bloom in 1956. It is the most renowned description of the levels of cognitive performance or intellectual growth and development. This taxonomy, or scientific process of classifying the stages of learning, can be thought of as 'goals of the training process or educational objectives'. That is, after having imbibed some education or at the end of a training session, the learner should have acquired certain new cognitive skills.

According to this classification, the cognitive domain involves knowledge and the development of intellectual skills. This includes the recognition of facts and concepts that contribute to the development of intellectual abilities. There are six major categories in Bloom's taxonomy outlined in the following order: knowledge, understanding, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation, starting from the simplest to the most complex. These categories or levels are considered to be hierarchical, characterized by progressive degrees of difficulty. That is, learners must master lower-level objectives first before they can build on them to reach higher-level goals.

Let us now examine the taxonomy in more detail. The reader may well compare this with the type of education he or she has received right from the primary school days up to the university level or with the objectives of our current educational system.

### Educational Objectives for the Cognitive Domain

Bloom's taxonomy provides an excellent

structure for planning, designing, assessing and evaluating training and learning effectiveness.

The first level is *knowledge*. It involves recalling information or data. The learner is asked to define, describe, identify, list, name, outline, recall, recognize, reproduce, select, state, etc. Examples include recitation of a Sanskrit verse from the Gita or recalling the phone number or name of a person. Knowledge represents the lowest level in Bloom's taxonomy. It is 'low' only in the sense that it comes first—it provides the basis for all 'higher' cognitive activity.

Only after a learner is able to recall information is it possible to move on to the second level of *comprehension*, which is giving meaning to information. It involves understanding the meaning, translation, interpolation, and interpretation of instructions and problems or stating a problem in one's own words. The teacher prompts a response from the students using words like distinguish, estimate, explain, generalize, give examples, interpret, predict, rewrite, summarize, translate, and so on. Explaining the meaning of the Sanskrit verse in one's own words in English would be a typical example.

The third level is *application*, which refers to using knowledge or principles in new or real-life situations. The learner at this level solves practical problems by applying information comprehended at the previous levels. The learning leader, as the teacher or instructor is preferably called, stimulates and guides the learners with words such as apply, compute, construct, demonstrate, operate, predict, prepare, relate, show, solve, etc. For example, applying Newton's law of gravitation to compute the distance a cricket ball will go when hit with a particular amount of force.

The fourth level is *analysis*—breaking down complex information into simpler parts. The simpler parts, of course, were learned at earlier levels of the taxonomy. The process of analysis separates concepts into component

parts so that its organizational structure may be understood. It distinguishes between facts and inferences. The teacher asks the learner to analyse, break down, compare, contrast, differentiate, discriminate, distinguish, identify, illustrate, outline, relate, select, separate and so on. For example, separately identifying different political viewpoints.

The fifth level, *synthesis*, consists in creating something that did not exist before by integrating information that had been learned at lower levels of the hierarchy. It builds a structure or pattern from diverse elements. It puts together parts to form a whole, with emphasis on creating a new meaning or structure. In the process of synthesis the learner categorizes, combines, compiles, composes, creates, devises, designs, explains, generates, modifies, organizes, plans, rearranges, revises, reconstructs, relates, reorganizes, rewrites or summarizes. For instance, the learner may design a machine or write a software application to perform a specific task.

*Evaluation* is the highest level in the hierarchy. It consists in making judgements about the value of ideas or materials based on previous levels of learning to compare a product of some kind against a designated standard. Here the learner appraises, concludes, contrasts, criticizes, defends, describes, evaluates, explains, interprets, justifies, relates, summarizes, supports, etc. Examples would include selecting the most effective solution, hiring the most qualified candidate, or explaining and justifying a new budget.

If any concept is to be interiorized in depth through the experience of learning it, it must pass systematically through every stage identified by Dr Bloom. Now we see that real training of the mind and intellect involves much more than merely mugging up information for competitive examinations or superficially touching upon concepts, or solving equations by plugging in variables into them. The real task of the teacher is to systematically stimulate and develop the higher-level skills

of analysis, synthesis and evaluation. A thorough intellectual formation can only be the result of a persistent step-by-step climbing to attain greater heights.

The mere imparting of knowledge leaves the student at the first stage and first stage alone. Most teachers are satisfied with the achievement of this step and proceed no further. Others—and these are in the minority—take the students to the application level and leave them fixated there, offering no incentive to proceed further. The primary reason for this is that the majority of our teachers are not trained in the art and science of teaching. They lack awareness, thorough knowledge and practical training in the application of the vast discoveries made in the fields of educational psychology, philosophy and sociology. One needs more than the knowledge of the subject matter to discharge the sacred responsibility of a teacher.

### **Teaching in the Light of Bloom's Taxonomy**

While developing the instructional objectives of a course, providing instructions, and evaluating student performance, it is important to keep in mind that there are different levels or outcomes of learning. Distinguishing among these is very critical. Skills at different levels must be taught and tested in different ways.

If teachers are unaware of the different levels of learning, they are likely to focus on one level to the detriment of others. For example, a teacher may teach higher-level thinking skills without realizing that these skills require the prior learning of basic skills that must be integrated into these higher-order skills. Or a teacher may teach a vast amount of factual information but never get around to teaching students to apply and synthesize this information.

In addition, it is not unusual to see a teacher who wants her students to learn higher-order thinking skills conduct examina-

tions that test only lower-level skills. Under such circumstances, the students are likely to put their efforts in the wrong direction.

Teachers often use the term *application* inaccurately. They assume that using the information in any way whatsoever represents the application level of Bloom's taxonomy. This, however, is not correct. For example, a child who 'uses' his memorization of the multiplication tables to write down '30' next to '5 times 6 equals' is working at the knowledge level, not the application level. A child who studies Spanish and then converses with a native Mexican is almost certainly at the synthesis level, and not at the application level. If the child made a deliberate attempt to get his past tense right, this would be an example of application. However, in conversing he would certainly be creating something new that did not exist before by integrating knowledge that had been learned at lower levels of the hierarchy, and that would be synthesis.

### **The Value of Bloom's Taxonomy**

Bloom proposed that the main value of the taxonomy is twofold: (1) it can stimulate teachers to scientifically, consciously and systematically help students acquire skills at all of these various levels, laying the proper foundation for higher levels by first assuring mastery of lower-level objectives; and (2) it provides a basis for developing measurement strategies to assess student performance at all these levels of learning.

However, we contend that an even more important third goal, which is the focus of this article, is achieved by the application of the taxonomy. It is a powerful and scientific mechanism for training the mind and intellect. Just as a well-qualified and experienced instructor in a gymnasium systematically takes the athletes through a series of well-chosen exercises and drills to develop their muscles and stamina, similarly, a well-trained teacher 'stimulates, exercises, develops, sharpens, strengthens and trains' the higher analytical

and critical thinking faculties of the learners through whatever subject matter is at hand. The 'exercises' that we come across at the end of chapters in textbooks are meant to exercise the mind. To fully benefit from them, students must do the exercises themselves with no or minimum help from the teacher. They must not run to a tutor each time they find something difficult, but must continue to struggle and wrestle with the exercises until knowledge comes from within the mind. No teacher must fully solve the problems for the student. The approach of the teacher should be to clear the obstacles and guide the students through the process. The student must himself discover the value of the struggle which leads to the joy of knowledge. It is in this way that the teacher helps in the development of the intellectual strength and stamina of learners, thus equipping them with powerful tools capable of analytical, critical and discriminative thinking which can be used for 'digesting and assimilating ideas' as envisioned by Swami Vivekananda.

The last three stages, consisting of analysis, synthesis and evaluation, lead to the peaks of intellectual formation and stimulate the student to rationalize, judge and make choices in a logical manner. A very small minority ever scales these peaks. Unfortunately, few teachers help the students reach the finale. When the discriminatory and critical abilities are not well exercised, persons lack depth of thought and clarity of understanding. It becomes evident from the attitudes and sweeping judgements passed on major issues, that thinking is superficial and lacks equilibrium, clarity and conviction.

Students must be brought to understand the workings of the mind and intellect to enable them to travel on the higher paths of their reasoning, judgements, and deductions. Such skills would help them reform false judgements! The history of the world has repeatedly corroborated the fact that the mob mentality has led people, including the youth, to accept

false and fanatical doctrines and ideologies, which they would have rejected had they been given proper training and made capable of considered reflection.

### **The Teacher and the Learner in the Light of Vedanta**

One of the foundations of Vedanta philosophy is the wonderful truth of the divinity of the soul. This divinity means that the soul in everyone is of the nature of infinite Existence, infinite Knowledge and infinite Bliss. The infinite library of knowledge is inherent in man. This perfect knowledge is covered by ignorance and education is the gradual process of manifestation of this perfection within by removing the coverings. If knowledge is like fire inherent in a piece of wood, then the process of education is like the friction that brings the flames out of the wood, and the teacher is the facilitator of that process. Just as nature itself provides the necessary water, air and soil needed for the growth and development of a seed into a strong and sturdy fruit-bearing tree—the function of an experienced gardener amounting to helping in this natural process by purveying water and manure—likewise, the teacher too helps in the growth and development of the intellect of the learner. Books, lectures and laboratories are only secondary aids in the process of discovery of knowledge.

What is the significance and implication of this Vedantic principle in education? In the light of the Vedantic outlook, both the teacher and the learner are active participants in the teaching-learning process, and education is the evolving of the intellect by bringing the infinite power of the soul to act upon thought. The teacher looks upon the learner not as a mere physical being but as a living and dynamic mind struggling to manifest the light of the infinite soul, the repository of all knowledge. He recognizes that just as the same electricity flowing through bulbs of different wattage gives out different amounts of light, likewise the same soul present in all beings

manifests itself in varying degrees depending on the difference in purity of the mind. He does not try to fill the mind with information and knowledge. Instead he attempts to unfold the creativity within by stimulating and strengthening the mind. The trainer carefully nurtures the conviction and faith in the mind of the learners that knowledge is within them by repeatedly demonstrating to the students that they are indeed bringing out knowledge aided by books, experiments, and the teacher herself. The tutor thus facilitates this process of self-discovery. Needless to say, she requires faith, patience, perseverance and firm conviction in this Vedantic principle of the innate divinity of humans and should try to arouse and awaken the same in the learner. This ideal of faith in oneself, or *atmashraddha*, is the greatest gift of a teacher to the student.

Similarly, if the learner possesses this firm conviction of having all knowledge

within and the understanding that education is the manifestation of this perfection, then there is less dependence on external aids in the form of books, tutors, classes and the like, and a greater struggle to manifest knowledge from within. No more does the student run to the teacher with a problem as soon as he encounters a small difficulty. He struggles with the problem himself, seeking the teacher's guidance only as a last resort. The teacher also does not spoonfeed the student and only facilitates his learning.

In this age of globalization, the future is sure to confront us with innumerable and unforeseeable opportunities and challenges. If any society or nation can combine the best of what the East and the West have to offer and successfully implement them in its education system, in whatever degree, it will be better prepared for those challenges and opportunities.

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### Teaching in Ancient India

‘These teachers explain the general meaning and teach them the minutiae; they rouse them to activity and skilfully win them to progress; they instruct the inert and sharpen the dull. When disciples, intelligent and acute, are addicted to idle shirking, the teachers doggedly persevere, repeating instruction until their training is finished.

‘There are men who, far seen in antique lore and fond of the refinements of learning, are content in seclusion, leading lives of continence. They come and go (lit. sink and float) outside of the world, and promenade through life away from human affairs. Though they are not moved by honours or reproach, their fame is far spread. The rulers treating them with ceremony and respect cannot make them come to court. Now as the State holds men of learning and genius in esteem, and the people respect those who have high intelligence, the honours and praises of such men are conspicuously abundant, and the attentions private and official paid to them are very considerable. Hence men can force themselves to a thorough acquisition of knowledge. Forgetting fatigue, they expatiate on the arts and sciences; seeking for wisdom while relying on perfect virtue they count not 1,000 *li* [200 miles] a long journey. Though their family be in affluent circumstances, such men make up their minds to be like vagrants, and get their food by begging as they go about. With them there is honour in knowing truth (in having wisdom), and there is no disgrace in being destitute.’

—Yuan Chwang



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# Learning: A Lifelong Process

DR N V C SWAMY

*'Javat banchi tavat shikhi; As long as I live, so long do I learn.'*  
—Sri Ramakrishna

## Education as Learning

It is usual convention to classify the subject of education under two categories—secular and spiritual. This is a Western concept. So far as the East is concerned, there is no distinction between the two. They are inextricably linked with each other and any division is only artificial. Nevertheless, this division has taken deep roots in our psyche. Hence we will approach the subject matter of this article from this point of view.

The quotation cited above is from a saint, who considered spiritual experiences far superior to mere knowledge of the world. However, we will examine how it applies to both types of education, secular and spiritual. We commence with secular education, by which we mean the kind of education imparted in schools and colleges, leading to degrees and diplomas.

The following incident occurred several decades ago, in the late 1950s, when I was a student at the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore. The details were narrated to me by a fellow student who was at that time doing her doctorate in pharmacology at the Institute. One day when she was sitting in her office doing some work, there was a knock on the door. When she asked the caller to enter, in came an elderly gentleman in his sixties, wearing white pants, shirt and coat, a tie askew, a pair of chappals and a white turban. He took a seat and said, 'I say, I am told you have studied something of microbiology. Would you mind teaching the subject to me?' My friend told me that she was taken aback when the gentleman

introduced himself. Every day, for a month, the gentleman would come to the Institute to sit with my friend for a couple of hours to learn microbiology. He later went on to apply his learning to the study of the physiology of vision and wrote a book about it. The name of the gentleman? C V Raman.

What is it that motivates a person like Raman to decide to learn an entirely new subject at such an advanced age? He had already done his best research work by that time and had already won the much coveted Nobel Prize. But there was that urge in him to learn, an urge that was not too particular about where or from whom he could learn something new. He was an example for what Sri Ramakrishna meant when he said: 'As long as I live, so long do I learn.'

## Learning v Schooling

We usually associate learning with educational establishments. We consider a person educated, if he or she has gone through the schooling system, entered college and graduated from a university. That is supposed to mark the end of the learning process. This is the common understanding of what education means. It reminds me of a story I heard long ago. A noted professor of astronomy from a highly reputed university was once invited to a formal dinner. He was seated next to a young lady in her late twenties. During the course of the dinner, the young lady asked the professor about himself. The professor replied, 'I am a student of astronomy.' The young lady looked at him up and down, at his grey hair and elderly face, and exclaimed, 'You mean you are still studying astronomy? I finished it long ago in my college!' It is obvious



that the word *learning* meant different things to them. For the young lady, learning was over with graduation from the college. For the professor, who had a broader perspective of knowledge, learning was a lifelong process.

It is an unfortunate fact that the system of education we follow in India is not geared to the *learning process*. It is oriented more towards providing information in the form of facts and figures, which should be reproduced faithfully in tests and examinations. The more the facts that can be reproduced, the brighter and more intelligent the student is rated to be. But ask any student a few days after his examinations how much he remembers of what he had learnt during the previous year; very few of them would confidently reply that they remember everything. This is because they have been trained like racehorses, which run a fast pace and are totally spent by the end of the race. I often wonder how many students would be able to answer their examination papers once again if they are given the same one month after the examinations are over!

I remember a nice story I had been told when I was young, which is a reflection on the kind of formal education we receive. A father and son went for a walk one evening. It started drizzling and they took shelter below a tree. The father thought that he would use this state of enforced inactivity to educate his son about the cardinal directions. He explained to the boy where east, west, north and south were. The boy learnt it fast and the rain also stopped. The father took his son home and proudly told the boy's mother about what their child had learnt. The mother was immensely pleased and asked the boy, 'Tell me, my pet, which is east?' The boy replied promptly, 'Let's go back to the tree.'

What is the moral of the story? It is a commentary on our system of secular education. Having gone through this system of education and having been involved in using this system in teaching for almost half a century, I can confidently say that our education system di-

vorces us completely from the world around us. All the subjects taught in schools and colleges—be they science, history, geography, sociology or psychology—impinge on our daily life. But we are hardly aware of it, because the system of education is such that knowledge gets confined within the covers of textbooks.

I was made aware of this facet of our educational system by a great man, Prof. Satish Dhawan. I was teaching aerodynamics at that time to students at the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras. I had invited Prof. Dhawan to our Institute. He was at that time the director of the Indian Institute of Science at Bangalore and was shortly to take over as chairman of the Space Commission. We were going by electric train to Chromepet, since he had a lecture at the Madras Institute of Technology, of which our current President, Dr Abdul Kalam, is an old student. On the way, he suddenly asked me, 'Would you like to see Benard cells?' I was taken aback, since this is a laboratory experiment to demonstrate convection rings in water or air. I was wondering what he was talking about, when he pointed to the sky and said, 'There are your Benard cells.' I saw the beautiful pattern in the sky which I had never observed before. It was then that Prof. Dhawan told me, 'See, your aerodynamics is all around you, not necessarily only in the textbooks.' Did not Sri Ramakrishna also display the same capability of keen observation, which is so well borne out by his wonderful parables? Maybe he had this capacity because he was not spoilt by book-learning!

### Literacy v Education

There are two words in the English language which are in common use and sometimes used synonymously. They are *literacy* and *education*. They appear to have almost the same meaning, but there is a subtle and important difference between them. Literacy implies a general acquaintance about a subject. A literate person is one who knows how to read

and write, and use this knowledge in daily life. Education, on the other hand, stands for more than a nodding acquaintance of any subject. It involves a deeper study leading to knowledge in depth. An educated person is one who has a broad knowledge of any subject and is capable of discussing it intelligently.

As an example, let us consider one of the hottest topics today, namely, environment. One can gain a lot of information about this subject by reading a few general books or newspaper articles, or even seeing television programmes. This is *environmental literacy*, which tells us what is meant by environment, what its importance for the planet is, how it is being mishandled, what are the grave dangers facing humanity, what needs to be done at the short-term or long-term level, and so on. There are lots of literate people who can read and write having this kind of literacy. But that does not make them educated.

There is another group of literate people, who have made a deep study of the technical aspects of environment. They are people who have specialized in certain areas of environment, who teach the subject at advanced levels, who are invited to contribute research papers or articles to magazines or journals, and whose voice is heard with respect. They are the educated experts in that field.

A statement of Sri Ramakrishna comes to mind at this stage. He used to say, 'There are some who have heard of milk, some who have seen it and some who have drunk it.' Only the last know what milk really is. The literate are those who have heard of milk or maybe even seen it. But the educated are those who have actually drunk milk and are in a position to say what milk tastes like.

## The Beginning of Education

The education imparted in schools and colleges makes us literate, but does not really educate us. One may argue that even if schools and colleges can only make us literate, there are always advanced courses where one can

get oneself really educated. One can always join a postgraduate programme and feel satisfied that one has really learnt something. If that also is not considered adequate, there are always doctoral programmes. Maybe that is the end of one's educational career as a doctorate really makes one a fully educated expert. This was the impression I also had. But as soon as I completed my doctorate, I was in for a rude shock. My professor congratulated me and told me that my real education started then! He explained to me that whatever I had undergone up till then was only a preparation towards real education. Even a doctorate is only a training programme, like the earlier programmes we go through in schools and colleges. That is as far as the formal educational programme can carry us. It teaches us the methodology of learning. Real education starts only from that point.

The best way of appreciating and understanding this is to become a teacher. There are two types of teachers. The first type consists of those who are content with what they have been taught in formal educational institutions and go on teaching it to students year after year without any change or updating. These are teachers who make use of their own student notes for teaching others. One could even predict what the teacher is going to teach if one had a peek into the lecture notes of one's seniors!

I once had an opportunity to serve on a committee for selection of teachers. The chairperson of the committee was a highly distinguished educationist. All members of the committee were very much impressed by a candidate, who had a teaching experience of fifteen years. Only the chairperson was not. When we asked him for the reason, he made a very pithy remark: 'Don't you see? He doesn't have an experience of fifteen years. He has one year's experience fifteen times over!' It is people of this type who have never cultivated the *art of learning*.

## The Real Learners

On the other hand, there are also teachers who are constantly alert and try to keep themselves up-to-date with the latest developments. They are the real *learners*. I had a teacher in my college days who was in his late fifties and on the verge of retirement. One day he burst into the class and exclaimed, 'You know, boys, I have just heard that a new instrument has come into the market. I have placed an order for it and as soon as it is received, we will all learn how to use it for better accuracy.' He was a learner in the truest sense of the term. Every one of us would have encountered someone or other in our lives who exhibited that zest for learning, for refreshing or improving one's knowledge for the sheer pleasure of it.

Sri Ramakrishna was a learner of that type. Whenever he heard that there was a God-lover in Calcutta, he would ask his nephew Hriday to take him to that person. He would approach that person with all humility and ask him, 'I am told that you love God and that you have had some experiences. Could you please tell me about them?' His sincerity and the charming way he would make his request would literally bowl over that person, who would consider himself blessed by Thakur.

## On Becoming a Learner

How does one acquire this skill? It is mostly by keeping one's eyes and ears open. A person who always swims in pools may encounter problems when he is asked to swim in the sea. The water in the sea is not calm as in the pool, nor is it shallow. The only method is to plunge into the sea and practise in stages. This requires two qualities: intense desire and hard work. Only those who have these qualities have the chance to become real learners.

It is a well-known fact that all children learn from imitation. They pick up words, phrases and even sentences from the talk of adults. In this sense, they educate themselves.

But something happens the moment they start attending school. Self-education stops and forced learning begins. The former needs a lot of time and is a slow process. A pre-school child has plenty of time at its disposal and time is of no consequence to it. Hence self-learning becomes possible. In schools the learning process gets accelerated and becomes tighter. Learning slowly transforms into cramming of information and the child is no longer capable of self-learning. However, this capacity lies dormant and when exercised comes to the surface again. In a way, the formal education system hardly gives any time to the child to exercise its capacity to learn by itself. After the end of the period of formal education, there is one more chance given to us to go back to self-learning. Those who are able to utilize this chance are the eternal learners and creative people. Those who are not, remain content with what they have learnt formally. But even they are sometimes forced into self-learning by the exigencies of circumstances. These are common experiences in all human societies.

## Learning in the Spiritual Realm

Whatever has been discussed above is from the point of view of what is usually called *secular knowledge*. Are these facts applicable to *spiritual knowledge* also? Much more so. As a matter of fact, self-learning is the only way that one can acquire Self-knowledge. This was the discovery of the ancient sages of India, who have left behind the records of their experiments in the Upanishadic texts. This is true not only of the Upanishads, but also of practical sciences, like raja yoga. We will now consider briefly how self-study plays an important role in this field.

The methodology of learning recommended by the Upanishads is the triune method of *shravana*, *manana* and *nididhyasana*. *Shravana* refers basically to hearing, but also includes reading, discussions and the like. *Manana* is contemplation of what has been studied or heard. *Nididhyasana* is concentration on

the subject to the exclusion of everything else. Usually, the initial knowledge about anything has to be acquired through a guru, because he is the dependable authority on the subject. *Manana* and *nididhyasana* depend on one's own effort, with some guidance from the guru. The role of the teacher is only as a guide-post. The journey has to be undertaken by us with our own efforts. The following example from the *Taittiriya Upanishad* is a good illustration:

Bhrigu approaches his father Varuna with a desire to know Brahman. The father says that 'food, vital force, eye, ear, mind and speech' are the aids to the knowledge of Brahman, and after having given him a few hints, tells the son to 'find out for yourself'. Having heard this instruction from the father, the son has to think for himself and contemplate on what he has heard. He discovers that the body is Brahman. When he approaches his father to verify this discovery, the father does not give any discourse. He simply tells his son, 'Think some more and find out for yourself.' After successive steps, the son finally realizes that ananda, or Bliss, is Brahman. This realization does not need any further verification from the father, because it is the son's personal experience.

What we notice in this example is the process of self-education. Based on a few hints given by the father, the son has to discover the answer by a gradual process of contemplation and meditation. There is no spoonfeeding involved. This was the way disciples were trained by teachers in the ancient Vedic culture who encouraged self-analysis. It is the constant thread running through the Upanishadic literature. No wonder the ancient gurukulas were able to produce such spiritual giants who dot the pages of the Upanishads.

The same methodology is to be seen in the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali. The very first aph-

orism tells us that what follow are a set of instructions, not for discussion but for practice. Education in yoga does not stop with the learning of the theory of the sutras, a few asanas and pranayamas. It is a lifelong practice and a learning process at the same time. Only those who are capable of learning continuously throughout their life can become successful yoga practitioners.

### Genius as a Learner

Learning is indeed a lifelong experience and there is no doubt about it. We continuously learn through our experiences, both good and bad, mostly through the latter. But this is more like a knee-jerk reaction. We respond to the situation in which we find ourselves placed. The kind of learning great people like Sri Ramakrishna refer to is of a different type altogether. They draw lessons from their experiences, which enrich their lives and serve the needs of others also in the process. A perusal of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* will amply bear this point out. It is full of parables and stories about Vedantic principles, but based on mundane experiences. We too have undergone such experiences; we too have seen whatever he observed. For us they are mere occurrences, for him they were indicators of profound truths. To be able to observe ordinary events and draw profound conclusions from them is the hallmark of genius. That is real *learning*. The seers, the prophets, the trailblazers are such learners; they are the ideals to be followed. The philosophy they pursue is aptly summed up by Sri Ramakrishna when he says, '*Javat banchi tavat shikhi.*' ~

(The author wishes to thank Kum. Heisnam Jina Devi, Lecturer, Swami Vivekananda Yoga Anusandhana Samsthana, Bangalore, for her help in the preparation of this article.)

Learning annihilates itself, and the most perfect is the first submerged; for the next age scales with ease the height which cost the preceding the full vigour of life. —Bunsen

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# Inclusive Education

DR M N G MANI

## Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan: A Mechanism to Reach Out

The Education Commission (1964-66), which provided for some basic changes in the educational system at large, covered a lot of ideas envisioned by Swami Vivekananda. The need to eradicate illiteracy in India was very much emphasized in its report. This was further echoed in the National Policy on Education (1986). It is disheartening that we have not even achieved 70% literacy after fifty-seven years of independence. The Commission wanted that all educated men and women available be mobilized for raising a force to combat illiteracy. The students and staff of educational institutions at all levels should be actively involved. Every educational institution should assume responsibility for liquidating illiteracy in its specific area.

Education for All (EFA) is still an unfinished agenda in India and this needs to be shaped according to Swamiji's vision. Thankfully, the methodology adopted by the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) reflects Swamiji's ideas on mass literacy and lifelong education.

### SSA—What It Is

Education is a fundamental human right of the child. Governments across the globe are deliberating on workable policies and practices to make education for all a reality within 2015. For its part, the Government of India has initiated the SSA. SSA is a

mission, an effort to universalize elementary education by community ownership of the school system. It is also an attempt to provide an opportunity for improving human capabilities of all children. The programme is a partnership activity between the central, state and local governments and it also provides an opportunity for the states to develop their own vision of elementary education.

The scheme has an excellent framework and allows a lot of flexibility at the district level in adopting cost-effective and innovative strategies to include all children. It covers all facets of comprehensive education: community participation, improving teacher skills, provision of learning materials, special emphasis on disadvantaged groups, and so on.

### Aims and Objectives of SSA

SSA's main aim is to provide useful and relevant elementary education for all children in the 6-14 age group by 2010. Its another goal is to bridge social, regional and gender gaps with the active participation of the commu-

nity in the management of schools. Its specific objectives are the following: 1) All eligible children must complete five years of primary schooling by 2007, and eight years of elementary schooling by 2010; 2) Focus on satisfactory quality and education for life; 3) Bridging all



'I am learning'





Learning together—the objective of inclusive education

gender and social category gaps; and 4) Universal retention by 2010.

### Inclusive Education: Beyond Disabilities

The International Disability Alliance, a consortium of international organizations working for persons with disabilities, has been underlining the importance of creating a *rights-based, barrier-free, and inclusive* society. The integrated family system and community living make inclusion a natural phenomenon in the Indian soil.

#### Inclusion of Persons with Unique Needs

Inclusive education has all along been an accepted approach in general education in India, though the concept may sound recent. General classroom teachers handle slow, average and advanced learners—all in one class. This is 'inclusive education' based on cognitive abilities though usually not labelled so. In the case of children with visual and hearing impairments, the main similarity between them and normal children is their cognitive ability. This similarity supports the education of disabled children along with normal children in the general system. With the learning of 'plus curriculum' to cope with their particular disability, these children can also compete with normal children.

Then why is there such a big campaign that we should switch over to inclusive education?

#### SSA in Coimbatore

The Coimbatore district of Tamil Nadu stands out in addressing all facets of the programme. One especially noteworthy feature is the district administration's collaboration with the International Human Resource Development Centre (IHRDC) for the disabled of Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya to achieve education for all children with disabilities much ahead of deadline. It is a general conviction in the district that once this most difficult group is brought under the umbrella of educational services, the overall target could be reached effectively.

#### Special Schools Leading to Segregation

The introduction of separate curricula changed the quality and extent of services for disabled persons worldwide. Braille and lip reading were miracles in the eyes of non-disabled people, and as a result the community started treating blind and deaf children as 'special'.

The growth of the special school concept and the institutionalization of disabled children contributed to their 'segregation' from society at large. Special schools became residential homes, and the coming together of disabled persons increased their sense of security. However, notions that disabled people are special or that they have a sixth sense con-



Learning 'plus-curricular' skills



Play therapy

tributed to stereotyped exclusivist responses. In special schools subjects like mathematics and science were often neglected due to the presumption that blind children would find them difficult. This focusing on the 'difference' between disabled and normal children created a sympathy towards the former that did not take into account their human right to general education. As a result, education of disabled children remained a welfare activity for decades.

With special schools becoming costly, inclusive education is again gaining acceptance. In the past 'inclusion' was inevitable due to lack of facilities, but today it is being seen as a child's human right to have education in the vicinity of his/her home. Therefore, revitalizing the general education system and strengthening the capacities of general classroom teachers to train disabled children are vital concerns currently. They have to be addressed before general education becomes truly inclusive.

### Disability Services in India: Some Models

Services for the disabled in India are more than a century old. Four significant models are in vogue here: 1) *Residential School for the Disabled*: Mostly urban, with special curriculum including vocational training. India has nearly 3,000 such schools serving 1.5 lakh children. 2) *Integrated Education—Resource Room Model*: One specialist resource teacher

catering to 8-10 disabled children studying with and evaluated on a par with normal children. Plus-curricular skills are taught. This is the most prominent model in India now. 3) *Integrated Education—Itinerant Model*: Specialist itinerant teacher with resource kit visits a cluster of schools 2-3 times a week to assist the disabled. Not very popular. 4) *Inclusive Education*: All children with disabilities, irrespective of severity, enrolled in general schools. All teachers oriented to their needs. Block-level resource centre for a cluster of schools. Currently preferred under EFA.

Cost considerations favour inclusion. The cost of inclusive education per child is about Rs 1,500 to Rs 2,000 per annum as against Rs 7,000 to Rs 20,000 in the other models.

### Sound Policy Perspectives and Practices

Inclusive education revolves round three main factors—*policies, practices, and cultures*. The Persons with Disabilities Act 1995 may look trivial at first sight but it is certainly a landmark law aiming at the inclusion of disabled persons in the mainstream. The Rehabilitation Council of India Act 1992 is another impressive concept in maintaining quality in special education manpower development. Many countries have evinced interest in these landmark acts.

In terms of practice also, India's achievements are remarkable. It is true that the cover-



Day care for mentally retarded children





Orientation for parents of disabled children

age of disabled children in its educational programmes is not more than 10%. But a figure of roughly 2,00,000 disabled children in over 20,000 schools in India is in itself mind-boggling. In addition, all inclusive practices are in vogue here and we have the expertise to help other developing nations to develop policies and practices. India's problem was never policies or models but expansion. Now with the SSA, that too is being fully addressed.

### Pressing Issues for Facilitating Inclusive Education

In order to facilitate effective inclusive education, the following three areas need utmost attention: 1) Preparing general classroom teachers *through in-service programmes, special capacity building programmes*; 2) Preparation and dissemination of support materials *by setting up context-specific resource centres*; and 3) Developing plus-curricular skills in disabled children *through deployment of special teachers, arranging summer programmes, and teaching these skills to teachers, peer-groups and parents*.

### Parameters of Successful Inclusion

Acceptance of inclusion by the general community, school authorities and parents, enrolment and retention rates on a par with normal children, admission of children irrespective of the type and extent of disability, basic knowledge and disability-management skills of general teachers, availability of appropriate teaching aids, specialist teacher and

peer group support, and comparable achievements in curricular and co-curricular activities—these constitute the parameters of successful inclusion.

Mere creation of an environment for inclusion is not enough. Efforts are needed to provide real educational support in the inclusive setting. The concept of inclusion as an ideology should be assimilated right from the classroom level, and in this context general teachers are the key players in inclusive education.

### Inclusive Schooling for Effective Education: General Teachers Hold the Key

Good education realizes the fact that every child is special in some way or other and the purpose of learning is to optimize the child's potential. Use of multi-sensory instruction in the classroom makes the teacher better and at the same time helps mentally challenged children and children with visual and hearing impairment. So the inclusion of disabled children depends on how effectively regular classroom teachers can teach. That is why teachers hold the key to creating an inclusive environment in the school.

Teachers must recognize the fact that true learning occurs in a non-threatening environment and try to create such an environment in the classroom. Such an atmosphere facilitates inclusion of children who experience



Concept development



Early identification programmes

learning difficulties. These children often succumb under pressure but succeed in a non-threatening learning environment.

The ability of the teacher to create different learning tasks within the classroom will satisfy the educational needs of all types of

children on the basis of their cognitive and sensory abilities and generate interest in learning.

Dr A P J Abdul Kalam often says that parents and teachers should allow children to dream and help them realize those dreams. In an effective inclusive setting, every child will be able to dream his/her own vision of the future and develop abilities to actualize it. The inclusive setting not only increases the involvement of children, but enriches their learning potential. It emphasizes that the child is a human resource in the learning process.

The paradigm shift from 'child as a student' to 'child as a human resource' paves way for a comprehensive and truly inclusive setting, *where every child is treated as special and the teacher becomes a facilitator of learning.*

## Educating Children with Disabilities through the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan: Coimbatore Experience

**I**n Tamil Nadu, the SSA scheme in the case of disabled children is being implemented through NGOs already working in the area of disability. In Coimbatore district, Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya's IHRDC is the nodal agency for programme implementation. All activities are initiated and monitored by an advisory committee comprised of officials at the district level and representatives from IHRDC.

SSA activities include early detection and identification; functional and formal assessment; educational placement; provision of aids and appliances; support services; teacher training; resource support; individualized education plan; parental training and community mobilization; planning and management; strengthening of special schools; and removal of architectural barriers.

Implementation of the SSA scheme requires certain procedures to be carried out sequentially. The district administration and the Vidyalaya jointly conduct *medical screening*

*camp*s with the support of block development officers and local officials.

The state government allots a *grant for each block for purchase of assistive devices* for disabled children and the requirements are jointly decided by the district administration and IHRDC.

In Tamil Nadu, more than 70,000 children with disabilities have been identified, assessed and enrolled in schools under SSA. In Coimbatore district 5,528 children have been



Medical camp to identify disability



Braille course for SSA teachers

identified and assessed and 4,391 enrolled in schools. Of these, 1,137 are receiving preparatory training and 3,645 have already benefited. The disabilities of these children range from visual and hearing impairment to mental retardation and cerebral palsy.

Depending on their educational needs, the children are categorized as follows: those with mild disabilities who can be handled by general classroom teachers with minimum training; those with mild/moderate disabilities who need counselling services; those requiring occasional assistance from special educators; and those requiring frequent assistance from special educators. Children with moderate/severe disabilities who are in need of resource assistance, including corrective aids and periodical help in academic areas, are helped by the special educators of their block.

With the support of the district administration, *block resource centres* have been established in all 22 blocks of Coimbatore district. Their purpose is to provide necessary training, assessment, and educational guidance to disabled children, their parents and regular teachers. Though all disabled children covered under the programme may not utilize the block resource centres, those in need of continuous training and therapy are attending these centres.

*Orientation programmes* are regularly organized for block resource supervisors, teachers, ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services), *anganwadi* and health workers of the whole district. All regular teachers working in

primary and high schools are given sensitization training on inclusion of disabled children in regular schools by special educators and trained block resource teachers. As the programme necessitates the involvement of people from all sections of society, the elected panchayat presidents are also given sensitization training on disability management.

There are children who need special school assistance and accommodation for at least six months to prepare themselves for mainstreaming in regular schools. Suitable organizations working in the field of disability have been selected to initiate *residential training centres* to help them.

Many *village education committees* (VEC) have been formed which include selected community leaders, NGO representatives, local headmasters and parents of children with special needs. The objective of the VECs is to support SSA activities through community ownership and participation.

Children with profound mental retardation experience difficulty in mainstreaming with the general education system. So *day care centres* have been created to prepare them for a period of one year before they are able to adapt.

### Success Stories

The success of any programme depends on the satisfaction of its consumers, in our case



Individualized instruction for slow learners



Speech therapy

the disabled children, teachers, and parents. The following statements provide a glimpse of the effectiveness of the programme being implemented by Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Coimbatore, and the district administration.

*Sujitha* was suffering from locomotor disability. She was totally dependent on others and could attend school only with the assistance of her father. To facilitate her mobility, she was provided with a tricycle in addition to training. Now she is attending school like her other counterparts.

*Harish* is a five-year-old. His father brought him to one of our screening camps for inability to communicate, when he was found to have profound hearing impairment. With hearing aids and adequate training, Harish can now communicate significantly with his family members and peers at the regular class.

*Kalaiselvi* (13) was finding it difficult to get through in many subjects due to poor vision. Special school teachers advised her to continue her education in the general system. After intervention by SSA, she was helped by her special educator to use a magnifier for reading. She is at present attending a block resource centre and improving her visual efficiency skills.

*Nagamani's* moderate cognitive difficulty (mental retardation) did not allow her to perform well in class. She was always left alone during daytime when her parents went out to

work. After inclusion in a regular school, Nagamani made many friends and started acquiring considerable learning skills. Her parents are happy that she is picking up some basic skills and life education through regular and support teachers.

### What They Say

This is what a *general classroom teacher* has to say: 'Education of disabled children is no more a problem since we have undergone basic training under a special educator. Disabled children pay more attention in the classroom. They never fail to approach class teachers and peer groups whenever they are in doubt. We are delighted to see their achievements. SSA is helping them gain confidence.'

The *peer group* has a tremendous impact on the personality development of disabled children. Some normal children describe how the SSA transformed their attitudes towards disability issues: 'Initially we did not know how to help or communicate with our disabled friends. The training given by special teachers has been very useful to us in establishing a good rapport with them. Inclusion of a disabled boy or girl in our class is not at all a problem for us. It is our responsibility to help them. We usually help our disabled friends in their academic studies during intervals, lunch time or after class hours. It helps us to recapitulate what we learnt in the classroom and also strengthens our friendship.'

That *parents* also are key players in the



Peer group assistance

SSA programme needs no special mention. Their encouraging words go a long way in reinforcing our confidence: 'The special educator appointed under SSA helped a great deal in enabling my son to pick up necessary basic skills and get enrolled in a regular school. Though he is visually impaired, he is able to manage his day-to-day activities, including his education.' 'Before inclusion my daughter, who is mentally retarded, could not do anything independently. She was restless and friendless. Now she has developed a good behaviour and can perform simple tasks by herself.' The parents are happy that their children are getting education in local schools along with their peers.

The *heads of educational institutions* are the main catalysts in the whole experiment. Their statements reflect their support for the programme: 'The training given by special educators to regular teachers is very helpful in educating disabled children in mainstream schools. We know a child who has speech problems but has learnt communication skills after inclusion. As a matter of fact, disabled children are performing very well in academic studies. Also they have more friends than normal children. Moreover, wheelchairs provided through SSA allow disabled children easy access to school.'

## Recognition

In 2003-04 the Tamil Nadu government recognized the contribution of Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Coimbatore, by selecting it as the best nodal agency implementing the SSA programme for disabled children. The recognition has only increased the centre's responsibility to perform even better and bring every disabled child in its purview under the umbrella of education.

## Conclusion

A rose is still a rose when it loses a petal. A tree may lose some leaves, but it is still useful. Likewise, a human being can still be useful despite the loss of a physical faculty. Helen Keller says that the most unfortunate person in society is one who has sight but no vision. In order to understand the abilities of persons with disabilities, one needs to have a broad vision of humanistic values. An inclusive society needs the support of parents, teachers, professionals and other community members. The SSA is determined to create such an inclusive society in India. Though the performance of states vary, the climate in general is conducive to the extension of educational services to disabled children. By bringing these children into the mainstream, we will in fact be empowering them with their rights. ~

## Inclusive Love

One of my classmates, Abhoy Pado Ghosh ... had injured his knee when he was a mere child, in an accident and could never recover. In those days perhaps, modern scientific treatment was not available. It became painful for him to climb up to the third floor but he had the fortitude to put up with it without ever complaining—he would go up or come down with a cheerful face. However, one day the Rector Mahashaya [M] happened to see him. What a tender and affectionate heart he possessed one could see then. He immediately ordered that our class should in future be held on the ground floor. Not even in class X did our class ever sit above the first storey because of our handicapped friend. I was just a small lad then but my heart was touched by that order of the Rector. I felt I was blessed in witnessing such tenderness and such affection of the Rector Mahashaya.

—Mahimaranjan Bhattacharya on Mahendranath Gupta (M)



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# The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna according to Girish Chandra Sen

SWAMI CHETANANANDA

## The Brahmo Movement

In 1828 Raja Rammohan Roy (1777-1833) founded the Brahmo Samaj in Calcutta. At the centre of this socio-religious movement is the belief that there is one God, who is omnipresent and omniscient. The Brahmo Samaj played a significant role in the renaissance of India, and the roots of some significant modern thinking in India can be traced back to the Brahmo movement. The organization promoted a monotheistic, reformed Hinduism with strong Islamic and Christian overtones, support for the rights of women, and opposition to such aspects of Hinduism as idolatry, the caste system, and animal sacrifice. When Rammohan Roy died in 1833, the Brahmo movement declined. It was revived in 1843 by Devendranath Tagore, who founded the Adi Brahmo Samaj and became its leader. Devendra was a classmate of Mathur Mohan Biswas, a great devotee of Ramakrishna and son-in-law of Rani Rasmani, founder of the Dakshineswar Kali temple. Ramakrishna went with Mathur to see Devendra at Calcutta and also visited the Adi Brahmo Samaj.

Keshab Chandra Sen (1838-84), a charismatic leader in Calcutta, joined the Brahmo Samaj in 1859. In 1863 he became a Brahmo minister and also the leader of the youth wing. In 1868 he had a personal conflict with Devendra, and the organization split. Keshab started the Brahmo Samaj of India along with Shivanath Shastri and Vijaykrishna Goswami. He went to England in 1870, where he preached monotheism. He wanted to abolish the caste system, and he introduced inter-caste marriage. Queen Victoria praised his oratory and leadership.

The Brahmo leaders decided that the minimum marriage age for girls should be fourteen, and for boys, eighteen. In 1878 Keshab broke that rule when he married his own daughter, who was not yet fourteen, to the Maharaja of Coochbehar. This created tremendous controversy and another schism formed. Keshab's followers formed a new group, the Navavidhan (New Dispensation), while the dissidents founded the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, which became more popular.

## Ramakrishna and Keshab Chandra Sen

On 15 March 1875, Ramakrishna met Keshab at the Belgharia retreat of Jaygopal Sen, where Keshab was training his ministers. As soon as the Master arrived with his nephew Hriday, he went into samadhi. When he had regained partial consciousness, he began explaining profound spiritual topics in simple language illustrated with such commonplace examples that all present gazed at him, enthralled. They did not notice when the times for bathing and eating came and went. The time for the next prayer was nearly upon them when Ramakrishna remarked: 'If any other kind of animal comes to a herd of cattle, they'll turn on it and gore it with their horns. But if a cow joins the herd, they'll lick its body and welcome it as one of themselves. That's what has happened to us here today.' Then addressing Keshab, the Master added, 'Your tail has dropped off.' That odd remark seemed to startle and displease Keshab's disciples. Realizing that they had not understood him, the Master went on to explain: 'As long as a tadpole has its tail, it can live only in the water; it can't come on land. But when its tail drops off,

it can live on land or in the water. Similarly, as long as a man wears the tail of ignorance, he can only live in the world; but when the tail drops off, he can live either in Satchidananda or in the world, whichever he pleases. Your mind, Keshab, has reached that state now. You can live in the world and still be aware of God.' All were overwhelmed. That day the Master discussed various topics, spent some delightful hours with them, and then returned to Dakshineswar.

After this first meeting, Keshab's newspaper, *The Indian Mirror*, published this news on 28 March 1875: 'A Hindu Saint: We met one (a sincere Hindu devotee) not long ago and were charmed by the depth, penetration, and simplicity of his spirit. The never-ceasing metaphors and analogies, in which he indulged, are most of them as apt as they are beautiful. Hinduism must have in it a deep sense of beauty, truth, and goodness to inspire such men as these.'<sup>1</sup>

It is Keshab Chandra Sen who first introduced Ramakrishna to the public. Most of the Master's disciples came to know about him through this religious leader. In Dakshineswar one day, Keshab said to the Master: 'Sir, if you permit, I want to make your message known to the public. It will definitely do people good and bring peace to the world.' Ramakrishna replied in an ecstatic mood: 'It is not the time to spread the message of this place [that is, his message] through lectures and newspapers. The power and ideas that are within this body will automatically spread all around in the course of time. Hundreds of Himalayas will not be able to suppress that power.' As the Master said this his eyes were wide open and his face radiated a wonderful glow. All were quiet. Then the Master went into samadhi.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the Master's discouragement, Keshab continued to spread news of the Master in his papers. *The Indian Mirror* printed on 20 February 1876: 'Ramakrishna, a Hindu devotee known as a Paramahansa, now living

at Dakshineswar, is a remarkable man and appears to have attained an extraordinary elevation of moral character and spirituality. Several Brahmo missionaries who have visited him from time to time speak highly of his devotion and purity and his deep insight into the realities of the inner world. Though a true Hindu he is said to sympathize heartily with the Brahmos of the advanced schools.'<sup>3</sup>

### Keshab Introduces Ramakrishna's Message

On 24 January 1878 Keshab collected the sayings of Ramakrishna and published a ten-page pamphlet in Bengali entitled *Paramahamser Ukti*. The Indian Brahmo Samaj published it, and it sold for two pice (7, 53). Whenever Keshab met with Ramakrishna, his teachings were recorded and published in the *Dharmatattwa* magazine of the Brahmo Samaj. Keshab was a charismatic orator and a powerful writer. He was behind several newspapers and journals that propagated his ideas, including *The Indian Mirror*, *The Sunday Mirror*, *Liberal*, *Theistic Annual*, and *New Dispensation* in English, and *Dharmatattwa*, *Sulabh Samachar*, *Mahima*, *Paricharika*, *Balak Bandhu*, *Dharmaprakash*, *Bangabandhu*, *Deshahitaishini*, *Bishavairi*, and *Bamabodhini Patrika* in Bengali. These Brahmo publications continued to spread the teachings of Ramakrishna. Thus the Brahmo version of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* began to take shape during his lifetime.

*The Theistic Quarterly Review* published the following report in October 1879:

If all his [Ramakrishna's] utterances could be recorded, they would form a volume of strange and wonderful wisdom. If all his observations on men and things could be reproduced, people might think that the days of prophecy, of primeval unlearned wisdom had returned. But it is most difficult to render his sayings into English. We here try to give some stray bits:

1. So long as the bee is outside the petals of the lily, it buzzes and emits sounds. But when it is inside the flower, the sweetness hath silenced the bee. It drinks the nectar, forgets the sounds,



and forgets itself. So the man of devotion.

2. Put the *gharā* (earthen pot) inside the brook of clear water. There is bubbling, there is noise, as long as the vessel is empty. When it is full, the bubbling ceases, the disturbance ceases. In silence and fullness the vessel lies in the depth of the element. So the heart of devotion.

3. Boil your sugar well in a living and active fire. As long as there is earth and impurity in it, the sweet infusion will smoke and simmer. But when all impurity is cast out, there is neither smoke nor sound, but the delicious crystalline fluid heaves itself in its unmixed worth, and, whether liquid or solid, is the delight of men and gods. Such is the character of the man of faith.

4. Through the stream of the troublous world I float a frail half-sunk log of wood. If men come to hold onto me to save their lives, the result will be this: they will drown me without being able to save themselves. Beware of [false] gurus.

5. Unshod and with bare feet who will venture to walk upon thorns and sharp stones? Shod with faith in Hari, what thorn or sharp stone can harm you?

6. Hold the pot well-driven into the ground with your hand, and then you can quickly revolve round and round without falling. Have faith in a fixed and strong principle, and then, though your movements may be many and rapid, no harm will ever befall you. Without principle, every movement is a step towards a fall.

7. Churn your pure milk before the sun rises, and the butter that is thrown up, gather, and put in clear water. There is another kind of butter that is obtained by churning whey after sunrise, and that is allowed to float in the whey out of which it is churned. The latter kind of butter represents the religion of the Brahmo Samaj, while the former is pure Hinduism.

8. Woman and wealth have drowned the whole world in sin. Woman is disarmed when you view her as the manifestation of the divine Vidya Shakti, the power of pure wisdom, as the mother of the human race.

9. O Mother Divine, I want no honour from men, I want no pleasure of the flesh, only let my soul flow into Thee as the permanent confluence of the Ganges and Yamuna. Mother, I am

without bhakti, without yoga, I am poor and friendless. I want no one's praise, only let my mind always dwell in the lotus of Thy feet.

10. God alone is true, all else is false (84-5).

Keshab and Ramakrishna had a wonderful relationship. The Master was very fond of Keshab. When Keshab was sick, the Master went to see him and made a special offering to the Divine Mother for his well-being. Keshab had tremendous love and respect for the Master as well. Sometimes the Master teased Keshab and his followers. Once he said:

I went to Keshab's place and watched their prayer service. After speaking at length about the glories of God, Keshab announced, 'Let us now meditate on God.' I wondered how long they would meditate. But, oh dear, they'd scarcely shut their eyes for two minutes before it was all over! How can one know God by meditating like that? While they were meditating, I was watching their faces. Afterwards I said to Keshab: 'I've seen a lot of you meditate, and do you know what it reminded me of? Troops of monkeys sometimes sit quietly under the pine trees at Dakshineswar, just as if they were perfect gentlemen, quite innocent. But they aren't. As they sit there, they're thinking about all the gourds and pumpkins that householders train to grow over their roofs, and about all the gardens full of plantains and eggplants. After a little while, they'll jump up with a yell and rush away to the gardens to stuff their stomachs. I saw many of you meditating like that.' When the Brahmos heard that, they laughed.<sup>4</sup>

Before he died in 1884, Keshab trained his Navavidhan followers to respect others' faiths. Each minister became adept in a particular faith; for example, Pratap Chandra Majumdar specialized in Christianity, Aghorenath Gupta in Buddhism, Trailokyannath Sanyal in Vaishnavism, and Girish Chandra Sen in Islam.

### **Girish Chandra Sen and the *Adi Kathamrita***

Girish Chandra Sen (1835-1910) was born in Dhaka. He was a linguist and knew Bengali, Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic, Urdu, and English.

When he joined the Brahmo Samaj in 1872, Keshab entrusted him with teaching the Quran. He spent thirty years translating the Quran from Arabic into Bengali, earning the title of Moulvi. He translated the lives of the Sufi saints from Persian into Bengali and edited them in six volumes under the title *Tapasamala*. A wonderful journalist, he regularly contributed to Brahmo newspapers and magazines. In 1875 he came in contact with Ramakrishna, and he associated with him for the next eleven years. When Ramakrishna passed away on 16 August 1886, Girish took part in the funeral procession.

After Ramakrishna's passing away Girish Sen wrote a short biography in Bengali that was published in the *Dharmatattwa* in 1886. It has been translated into English and published in *Ramakrishna as We Saw Him* (Vedanta Society of St Louis, 1990; Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1992).

While Ramakrishna was still alive, Girish began recording the Master's wisdom. He collected sayings from 1875 to 1878, and then published them in Bengali as *Srimat Ramakrishna Paramahamser Ukti* (Sayings of Ramakrishna Paramahansa).

In 1983 Shyamal Basu edited this collection and published it in Bengali under the title *Adi Kathamrita* (Original Gospel). This book, which contains 184 teachings of Ramakrishna, has not been translated into any other language. Ramakrishna's colloquial Bengali was a blend of formal language and rural dialect. In the *Adi Kathamrita*, Girish set Ramakrishna's dialogues in a question-and-answer form, and changed his village patois into the more formal, elegant Bengali that was commonly spoken in the 1870s.

The language of the *Adi Kathamrita* is different from that of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*) recorded by M. The latter tried to preserve Ramakrishna's words intact, whereas Girish Sen took Ramakrishna's ideas and put them in his own language. We don't find the simplicity,

originality, freshness, beauty, and sweetness of Ramakrishna's words and expressions in his book that we find in *M's Gospel*. Moreover, Ramakrishna's teachings are packed with similes, metaphors, and day-to-day examples that are understandable even to common folk. Girish heard the conversation, stories, and parables of Ramakrishna and then recast them in his own language. But in this book one finds some teachings that do not appear in *M's Gospel* or in any other collection of Ramakrishna's sayings.

It should be mentioned that not all Brahmos were devoted to Ramakrishna. Some were his friends and admirers, but others were very critical of his teachings and sceptical about his life. Some even considered Ramakrishna's episodes of samadhi to be epileptic fits. Keshab and his followers, however, were greatly influenced by Ramakrishna. For example, they learned to sing and dance in the name of God. Before they met Ramakrishna, they would not show any emotion in their sadhana; they followed the Vedas and repeated their prayers, quoting texts from the scriptures. After coming in contact with Ramakrishna, the Brahmos introduced the concept of the Motherhood of God into their tradition. Ramakrishna visited both Keshab's Navavidhan and the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj guided by Shivanath Shastri and Vijaykrishna Goswami.

Ramakrishna's audience was composed of Indians who had been influenced by Western education and culture, religion and philosophy. Ramakrishna presented ancient India's spiritual tradition to his Westernized audience. Some of the monastic disciples of Ramakrishna, including Swami Vivekananda, were members of the Brahmo Samaj. These English-educated disciples used logic and reason to challenge the Master's views, and Ramakrishna easily and joyfully faced their challenges and used his own experience to convince them of the truth of what he said. One can counteract a particular scriptural text

with another and a lower reasoning by a higher reasoning; but one cannot nullify experience. For example, one who has tasted sugar and knows it to be sweet will laugh if scientists and philosophers say that sugar tastes sour or bitter. Similarly, Ramakrishna's experience of God and his samadhi overwhelmed the atheists, agnostics, and sceptics whom he encountered, and all their arguments were refuted.

### Excerpts from the *Adi Kathamrita*

Some of the following teachings are not found in any English translation of Ramakrishna's sayings:

Question: 'Do the great spiritual souls sometimes face depression and doubt?'

Ramakrishna: 'The tremendous current of the Padma River sometimes turns into whirlpools on its course, but shortly it again begins to flow in a straight way. Similarly, depression and doubt arise momentarily in the minds of the great souls; but they do not last, they disappear quickly.'<sup>5</sup>

Question: 'The Muslims loudly pray "Allahu Akbar". Does it mean that they have seen God?'

Ramakrishna: 'He who has realized Allah becomes overwhelmed and is silent. He who has not seen Allah shouts, saying "Allah, Allah"' (8).

Question: 'If the body is impermanent, why then is a devotee careful about it?'

Ramakrishna: 'Nobody cares for an empty iron safe. But people take special care of it if it is full of gold coins and precious gems. Similarly, if God manifests in the heart of a holy person, people cannot help but serve and care for that person's body' (63).

Question: 'Why do tears trickle from the eyes during upasana?'

Ramakrishna: 'When one side of a log starts to burn, its moisture comes out as drops of water from the other side of the log. Similarly during meditation, the spiritual fire enters the heart and causes tears' (64).

Question: 'We are mentally and physically weak. Is it possible for us to do any great thing?'

Ramakrishna: 'As the strong wind carries a fallen dry leaf a long distance, so weak and inca-

pable people receive tremendous power by the grace of Brahman and accomplish great works' (64-5).

Question: 'How can one make one's devotion steady and permanent?'

Ramakrishna: 'If you hang a jar of water with a sling in your room, the water will dry up after a few days. But if you keep your jar under the surface of the Ganges, it will never dry up. Similarly, if one's mind is immersed in the all-loving God, one's love and devotion never dries up. One should not feel secure after having love and devotion only for a day; it will soon dry up like the water in the hanging jar' (66-7).

Question: 'What is your opinion about modern preachers?'

Ramakrishna: 'They have food for two hundred people, but they invite thousands. They practise very little sadhana, but they declare themselves to be gurus and start preaching religion' (69).

Question: 'Why can we not see the Divine Mother?'

Ramakrishna: 'She is the aristocratic daughter of a very rich person and lives behind a screen. Those who are devotees of the Mother go behind the screen and see Her' (79).

Question: 'Jesus' enemies crucified him, but he prayed for their welfare. How could this be?'

Ramakrishna: 'If one drives a nail into an ordinary unripe coconut, it penetrates through the fibre, shell, and kernel; but when the coconut becomes ripe and water evaporates from the inside, the kernel is separated from the shell. At that time the nail cannot pierce the dry kernel. Jesus Christ was like that dry coconut. His Atman was separated from the body. His enemies nailed his body but not his Soul. That is why his body endured the pain of that piercing nail, but his Soul prayed for the good of his enemies' (83-4).

Question: 'What is the strength of the spiritual aspirant?'

Ramakrishna: 'As a child cries for the mother, so crying for God is the strength of an aspirant' (85).

Question: 'How does God dwell in the human body?'

Ramakrishna: 'He lives in the body like the plunger in a syringe' (87).

Question: 'Will all people see God?'

Ramakrishna: 'Nobody can live in this world without food; some eat at 2:00 p.m., some in the evening. Similarly, all will see God some-time or other' (90).

Ramakrishna's similes and metaphors glitter like gems. They create wonderful images in readers' minds, helping them to visualize the truths of which he spoke. Ramakrishna explained lofty spiritual concepts using such simple language and homespun examples that left hardly any room for one to doubt him.

The *Adi Kathamrita* of Girish Chandra Sen has a historical value. It was published twenty-five years before M's popular *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, while Ramakrishna was still alive. Some devotees might have read it to him.

Ramakrishna did not care for publicity; he was happy to lead his own life. His attitude was: When flowers bloom, bees come of their

own accord. He also felt that one should not quarrel or fight about religion. He simply declared: First be spiritual, and then love and serve human beings as God. The goal of human life is to realize God. ~

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## In the Company of Sri Ramakrishna

In 1881, Keshab Chandra Sen, accompanied by a fairly large party, went on board a steam yacht belonging to his son-in-law, Maharaja Nripendra Narayan Bhup of Coochbehar, to Dakshineswar, to meet Ramakrishna Paramahansa. I had the good fortune to be included in that party. We did not land, but the Paramahansa, accompanied by his nephew, Hriday, boarded the steamer. ...

After he had sat down, the Paramahansa glanced round him and expressed his approval of the company sitting around by saying, 'Good, good! They have all good large eyes.' ... The next moment he lost all interest in the people present and began to speak of the various ways in which he used to perform his *sadhana*. 'Sometimes I would fancy myself the Brahminy duck calling for its mate.' There is a poetic tradition in Sanskrit that the male and female of a brace of Brahminy ducks spend the nights on opposite shores of a river and keep calling to each other. Again: 'I would be the kitten calling for the mother cat, and there would be the response of the mother.' After speaking in this strain for some time, he suddenly pulled himself up and said with the smile of a child: 'Everything about secret *sadhana* should not be told.' He explained that it was impossible to explain in language the ecstasy of divine communion when the human soul loses itself in contemplation of the deity. ... And so the marvellous monologue went on until the Paramahansa began to talk of the *Nirakara* (formless) *Brahman*. He repeated the word *Nirakara* two or three times, and then quietly passed into *samadhi*, even as the diver slips into the fathomless deep.

—Nagendranath Gupta

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# History, Religion and Humanity

SWAMI SANDARSHANANANDA

*(Continued from the previous issue)*

## Synthetic Vision of Vivekananda

Swami Vivekananda considered socialism a 'half loaf'—which was better than no loaf. His critical thinking helped him make insightful predictions of impending socialist revolutions: 'The next great upheaval which is to bring about a new epoch will come from Russia or China.'<sup>10</sup> He was proved correct when the first socialist revolution took place in Russia and not in Britain, as Marx wrongly conceived in view of the latter's being industrialized and capitalist. Marx was again proved wrong when the USSR disintegrated and its constituent states took to capitalist forms of government. And now China, by adopting a liberal approach, has brought about a boom in its economy with capital investments in the open market, defying the basic tenets of socialism. Given a little spiritual twist, its way is likely to emerge as a popular brand of socialism in the near future.

On the other hand, affluence alone is not a panacea for social ills, for the arrogance it breeds gives rise to a kind of sophisticated savagery. Swamiji 'had a clearer view of the underlying selfishness of capitalism and struggle for privilege'. Capitalism, without moral and spiritual restraints, increases man's passion for possession. Wealth then becomes a bane. And as this is true for an individual, so is it true for a nation. This is observable in the circumstances prevailing in Iraq. If Saddam Hussein as an individual reflects how harmful concentration of power and property in a single person can be, the hegemonic designs of the US have evoked widespread criticism. If socialism pushes society back to a covert primitive bargaining culture where man becomes a

commodity by virtue of his labour, capitalism takes society forward to an overt marketplace where man gets inebriated with commercialism. Exclusively, neither is desirable. History has proved that 'harmony' is the theme of the modern age; we need it for our material as well as spiritual well-being. In order to achieve that, however, we must renounce all terrorism, state-sponsored or otherwise.

## Buddha's Synthesis

Paradoxically, although Buddha was not a social reformer in the general sense of the term, he did something of immeasurable social value. The religious and socio-economic oppression he had to reckon with demanded a revolution, for which the benign 'rebel' in him provided leadership. He intently studied the book of human nature and urged man to wage war against his own evil inclinations. Swami Vivekananda rightly says: 'Buddha was the Washington of the religious world; he conquered a throne only to give it to the world, as Washington did to the American people. He sought nothing for himself.'<sup>11</sup> Buddha rescued people from the clutches of priestcraft and feudalism and thus restored democracy.

As Swamiji said, 'the history of the world is the history of a few men who had faith in themselves' (8.228). It is their love and human sympathy that holds civilization together despite the countless forces working to disrupt it. They are indeed the salt of the earth whom mankind can ill-afford to dispense with. Swamiji says: 'History of civilisation is the progressive reading of spirit into matter. The ignorant see the person in the non-person. The sage sees the non-person in the person.'



Through pain and pleasure, joy and sorrow, this is the one lesson we are learning' (8.429).

### Sri Krishna and the Mahabharata

In order to understand India one has to acquire a clear idea regarding her spiritual heritage that composes her true history, the strain of which is still palpable in every pulse beat of her national life. Religion has given shape to her civilization through millennia. Foreign invaders could never touch her nerve centre, even while they were unleashing the worst kind of persecution.

Much of ancient Indian history is the story of a protracted struggle between the priestly and the kingly classes. When this struggle became fierce it gave rise to Buddhism. In a similar situation in the more remote past, there had appeared Krishna, the great harmonizer. He gave the Gita, reconciling the philosophies of the work and knowledge portions of the Vedas, over which the priests and the kings were sharply divided. Not only that, he left behind a personal legacy that is vibrant even today. Showing his deep sense of reverence for Krishna, Swamiji says:

He is the most rounded man I know of, wonderfully developed equally in brain and heart and hand. Every moment [of his] is alive with activity, either as a gentleman, warrior, minister, or something else. Great as a gentleman, as a scholar, as a poet. This all-rounded and wonderful activity and combination of brain and heart you see in the Gita and other books. Most wonderful heart, exquisite language, and nothing can approach it anywhere. This tremendous activity of the man—the impression is still there. Five thousand years have passed, and he has influenced millions and millions. (1.457)

The fundamental lesson Krishna taught is that the inconsistency between our thought and action lies at the root of all troubles. That results in our complex and irrational behaviour. Living the life, Krishna shows us how to find the greatest calmness in the midst of intense activity, and amidst the greatest peace, intense action. It does not matter if we do not know for

sure whether he is a historical personality. But it speaks amply of a people who could imagine such a character, positing in him all the sterling qualities that one should aspire for. Swamiji says again: 'My regard for him is for his perfect sanity. No cobwebs in that brain, no superstition. He knows the use of everything, and when it is necessary to assign a place to each, he is there' (ibid.).

A tree is known by its best fruits. Similarly, religion should be judged by the saints and seers it has been producing since the dawn of civilization, and not by the priests who use it as a tool for selfish ends. If spiritual personalities are not taken into account while analysing human history, the assessment is bound to be faulty. The sense of history works at the deepest levels of a nation's collective psyche; the more a nation is conscious of its *real* history, the more the number of spiritual people it can find in its chronicles. And the chief concern of such people is the correct analysis of human nature and conduct.

The Mahabharata is an apt example. But for the existence in India of so many genuine spiritual characters, a monumental work like that—containing as it does a comprehensive code of history, politics, religion, philosophy, morality, ethics, aesthetics and sociology centred upon human behaviour—could not have been produced. The epic rightly says about itself that what is not found therein is not found anywhere. So such an accomplishment is a valid indicator of the vibrant thought and remarkable ability of the people of its time. And the study of those intuitive souls who create such works is pertinent, for they provide insights that ordinary scholars cannot.

### Swamiji's Vision of History

Hence it did not escape Swamiji that the history of the world can be read as a march of events with the ruling power changing hands from one class to another. This goes on in cyclical order, and now it is for the labourers to appropriate the privileges that the priests, kings



and merchants had earlier enjoyed in succession. But the prophet that he is, Swamiji warns that the working class must not enjoy its power at the cost of human culture, for that would make a travesty of civilization. Unfortunately, we in India did not use Swamiji's formula for social regeneration: Take man where he stands and from there give him a lift. Therefore, much to our humiliation, we are suffering the consequences in every important sphere of our life, be it education, health or industry. Thus we have sown the seeds of our folly in the fields of history only to reap its bitter results.

Nevertheless, it is heartening to see that some of our historians are, after all, 'stressing the need to look at, or take stock of the past, with a view to understanding processes rather than events—processes that have shaped our attitude and structured the ever changing society of mankind.'<sup>12</sup> They are stressing the need to explore the lives of prophets and sages who have moved the world by the strength of their spirit: 'The world has never searched, never found so much peace as he (Siddhartha) was immersed in. Here, the ascent was driven by a quest more engrossed with man's inner possibilities than what the outside world can provide' (ibid.).

### **Sri Ramakrishna and the 'Indian Way'**

One need not go too far into the past seeking exemplars: the 'phenomenon' of Ramakrishna is very much alive in our minds. In the latter half of the nineteenth century he freely interacted with many who are considered pioneers of the Indian Renaissance. Arnold Toynbee, one of the greatest historians of the twentieth century, acknowledges with deep admiration his uniqueness and his contributions to humankind. He thought that Ramakrishna's life would offer solutions to the problems of the future, and hence Ramakrishna is more modern than the most modern man today. Vivekananda says, 'Ramakrishna has no peer; nowhere else in the world exists

that unprecedented perfection, that wonderful kindness that does not stop to justify itself, that intense sympathy for man in bondage.'<sup>13</sup>

History must judge why this poor man draws such enormous respect. How could he be so happy, even to the extent of making his happiness contagious, although he was utterly poor? Why do some scholars and intellectuals believe that he is a pathfinder? Perhaps one answer to these questions is that he was a living embodiment of that part of our collective being that shapes history and inspires us to forge ahead in spite of the adversities we are constantly confronted with in this world. This assumption finds an echo in the words of Vivekananda: 'He had lived in one life the whole cycle of national religious existence in India' (7.483). Correspondingly, Toynbee is also seen pointing to the 'Indian way' of harmony and non-violence—of which Ashoka, Ramakrishna, and Mahatma Gandhi were perfect examples—as the only alternative to destroying ourselves.

Sister Nivedita saw in her guru the very qualities that Toynbee and Vivekananda see in Ramakrishna. She says: 'I see in him the heir to the spiritual discoveries and religious struggles of innumerable teachers and saints in the past of India and the world, and at the same time the pioneer and prophet of a new and future order of development.'<sup>14</sup> She is convinced 'that each trace of those higher and uncommon modes of thought and consciousness to which he held the key, has its significance for the modern age' (97).

Swamiji's mind was largely occupied by the thought of history. He was in search of the real human being amidst the vicissitudes of civilizational development. His keen observation led him to formulate this profound message: 'Truth does not pay homage to any society, ancient or modern. Society has to pay homage to Truth or die. Societies should be moulded upon truth, and truth has not to adjust itself to society. If such a noble truth as unselfishness cannot be practised in society, it is

better for man to give up society and go into the forest.<sup>15</sup>

A great deal of introspection is required on the part of the powerful nations if they are to redeem themselves of the sin of destroying countless lives to achieve their selfish ends. A quick and mechanical philanthropic genuflection does not make a seeming act of service worthy of the name 'humanitarian aid'; man certainly does not live by bread alone. Rich nations must shed political gimmickry to be genuinely respected by the developing world. The strength of the purse can hardly stand comparison with the power of the Spirit; and no material power can resist the Spirit's resurgence. In reacting to the imperialist excesses of British rule in India Swamiji had announced in a prophetic vein: 'If man cannot believe in the Vengeance of God, he certainly cannot deny the Vengeance of History. And it will come upon the English; they have their heels on our necks, they have sucked the last drop of our blood for their own pleasures, they have carried away with them millions of our money, while our people have starved by villages and provinces' (7.280). Within a few decades of his passing away the nation which was proud of an empire over which the sun never set was reduced to its own island home. But Swamiji was thinking in terms of much broader time spans and we are yet to witness the full outcome of his prediction.

## Conclusion

Ironically, people never take lessons from history. For the attainment of peace and happiness, people of all nations have to 'look upon themselves as pilgrims to the same Shrine of Truth'. They have to enthusiastically respond to an inspiring call given by Swamiji:

That society is the greatest, where the highest truths become practical. That is my opinion; and if society is not fit for the highest truths, make it so; and the sooner, the better. Stand up, men and women, in this spirit, dare to believe in the Truth, dare to practise the Truth! The world

requires a few hundred bold men and women. Practise that boldness which dares know the Truth, which dares show the Truth in life, which does not quake before death, nay, welcomes death, makes a man know that he is the Spirit, that, in the whole universe nothing can kill him. Then you will be free. Then you will know your real Soul. (2.85)

History is currently being redefined. The present demand is for a more egalitarian assessment of humans as makers of history. What is required is a sincere probe into the endeavours of millions of ordinary people silently discharging their duties to shape the citadel of peace, for the real 'history of the world is in the little acts of sacrifice performed in every household' (8.240). If history does not elicit interest in the study of the 'real man' behind the veneer of the 'apparent man' and fails to provide an incisive look into the depths of human existence, its meaning and purpose, it is then simply an aimless academic pursuit. Since history's chief concern is to unravel truth, in dealing with history we must first try to understand what constitutes the 'real' in man before we seek to explain the world outside, bearing in mind the deep truth contained in the following words of Swamiji's: 'Philosophers might fret and sneer, and priests ply their trade even at the point of the sword, but truth comes to those alone who worship at her shrine for her sake only, without fear and without shopkeeping' (4.258). ~

## References

10. His Eastern and Western Admirers, *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1983), 187-8.
11. CW, 7.59.
12. See Amitabha Chowdhury's foreword in *Time and Tide*, ed. P K Sen and T Bhattacharya, (Calcutta: Creative Printers, 2000).
13. CW, 6.231.
14. Sister Nivedita, *The Master as I Saw Him* (Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, 1972), 96-7.
15. CW, 2.84.



## Reviews



*For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA  
publishers need to send two copies of their latest publications.*

**Eternal Mother.** Sri Sarada Math, Dakshineswar, Kolkata 700 076. E-mail: *srismath@vsnl.com*. 2004. viii + 304 pp. Rs 80.

It is to mark the twin events of Holy Mother's 150th birth anniversary and the golden jubilee of the Sarada Math that this anthology of thirty articles by monks, nuns and erudite lay devotees of the Ramakrishna-Sarada movement has been brought out. The articles have been grouped into four sections—Altars of Shakti: The Divine Feminine Principle; Reified Divinity: Life and Teachings of Sri Sarada Devi; Inundation of the Infinite: Sri Sarada Devi's Relevance Today; and Evolution of a Revolution: Sri Sarada Math and Sarada Movement. So far as could be gathered from the References at the end, twenty-one of the articles are contributions appearing for the first time in the present volume, while the remaining nine are original/translated reproductions of articles published in journals or edited selected portions compiled from one or more books.

Irrespective of the section-wise grouping of the articles, the reviewer finds it easier to discuss them under three broad heads representing three aspects of the 'phenomenon' called Sri Sarada Devi: 1. Holy Mother's relevance in the lives of individuals; 2. Holy Mother's role as *sanghajanani*; 3. Holy Mother as a distinctive power for the regeneration of humanity.

Holy Mother influenced those who came in contact with her during her lifetime through the immensity of her love, which invariably gave an upward turn to the course of their lives. Pravrajika Bharatiprana's memoir, the story of 'Mata Devi's' influence on Sister Nivedita as told by Pravrajika Bhavaprana, V Narayanan's brief account of his meeting with Holy Mother, the incidents in the lives of some devotees narrated by Pravrajika Ajayaprana, and the various happenings in the lives of contemporary devotees mentioned in some of the other articles testify to this. What is more, this is a continuing process. Sri Ramakrishna had the attitude of a mother (*matribhava*) towards everybody

and Holy Mother remains the embodiment of that compassionate attitude even to this day, for everybody all over the world. This is stressed in the opening article by Pravrajika Shraddhaprana and factually borne out by Amrita Salm in her interesting report of the findings of a questionnaire survey of 336 devotees living in America and Europe. But apart from being an embodiment of divine Motherhood, Holy Mother was an exemplar—a living model—of Vedanta in everyday life. She lived her life, established in Oneness and Bliss, and demonstrated to householders and monastics alike that the Vedantic ideal can be actualized amid the thousand and one distractions of life in the world. This aspect of Holy Mother's life is also well depicted in some other articles, notably in those by Pravrajika Mokshaprana and Pravrajika Bhavaniprana, and the eminently readable one by Swaraj Majumdar, who dwells on her sense of humour. Shelley Brown in her article examines the extent to which the teachings of Holy Mother's life can be found reflected in Swami Vivekananda's writings.

Holy Mother's role as *sanghajanani* started quite early, right after Swami Vivekananda established the Ramakrishna Mission. She was the interpreter of Sri Ramakrishna's ideal, 'the high court of appeal' for the resolution of doubts regarding policies and courses of action, and generally the supreme directrix guiding the Mission's line of development. She sowed the seed of what later became the Sarada Math by inaugurating Sister Nivedita's school and gracing its residential annexe (Matri-mandir) by her month-long stay there. Even after her passing away, it was her inspiration which worked relentlessly for more than three decades and led to the germination, sprouting and growth of that seed into the women's math. Swami Prabhananda has ably described all these developments in 'The Early Years of the Ramakrishna Order'. (The title conceals the theme of the article, which really is about Holy Mother's role in these developments.) Pravrajika Prabuddhaprana and Hiltrud Rustau give further details of the preparations and developments culminating in the found-

ing of the women's math, the former with particular emphasis on the contributions of Western women to it.

Of the three aspects mentioned above, the third is the most important. Swamiji said that the advent of Sri Ramakrishna marks the beginning of a new era. Holy Mother's life has a dominant role to play in the unfolding of this era. This is firstly because the regeneration of humanity can only be through the regeneration of women. Holy Mother's life presents before women the blazing ideal of a combination of all-embracing love, detachment and dignified independence. From a broader perspective, she, as the embodiment of divine Energy, holds out for mankind the promise of knowledge, both secular and spiritual. Humanity badly needs such knowledge in order to scale new heights in its path of progress. Swami Ranganathananda eloquently brings out these points in his short but beautiful piece of writing. Among others, Kamala Rao's excellent article examines the relevance of Holy Mother's life vis-à-vis contemporary women's issues. The 'middle course' between traditionalism and feminism charted out by Mother for women of the new era, her bridging the ancient and the modern, her quiet way of negating useless social barriers, the incisiveness of her insight into the affairs of the world and the breadth of her holistic vision of life in general—all very much in tune with the emerging thought patterns—are discussed in a number of articles.

There are some other excellent articles that do not strictly come under any of the three heads listed above. These deal with topics like the scriptural background of worship of God as Mother, scriptural support behind women's right to monasticism, women seers and nuns of India in Vedic and later times, how Sarada Devi blossomed into Holy Mother, and the lives of the leading torch-bearers of the Sarada Math. The reviewer would regard these as preambles to or follow-ups of the above main topics.

Since the volume marks the golden jubilee of the Sarada Math, one would naturally like to know about its growth and expansion (and about its associate, the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission) during the last fifty years. This curiosity is only partially satisfied through gleanings from some of the articles. A full-scale treatment of this aspect of the movement would have been most welcome.

The standard of editing is generally high. Only

in the case of a few reproduced articles there is some difficulty in identifying the sources. (For instance, in Asha Devi's article the source cited has the year 2004 against it; but the actual source is a Bengali article that appeared in 1946, of which the cited source is only a translation. This became clear only after reading Hiltrud Rustau's contribution. Since the context of the article is of great importance for understanding its significance, it is always better to cite the original source.) But these are minor blemishes. Readers interested in Holy Mother, and the Ramakrishna-Sarada movement, and even those concerned only with the women's movement will find much food for thought in this very moderately priced volume.

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**The Daily Evening and Morning Offering.** H W Bodewitz. Motilal Banarsidass, 41 U A Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar, New Delhi 110 007. Email: [mlbd@vsnl.com](mailto:mlbd@vsnl.com). 2003. xii + 211 pp. Rs 195.

The earliest religious activity of the Vedic stream was the *śrauta agnihotra*. The lighting of the mystic fire with *araṇi* wood and offering oblations to it was elevated into a keen esoteric ritual, thanks to the Agni Suktas, which lead the Rig Vedic hymns. It is a ritual that has endured to this day and there has been a good deal of interest in this ancient tradition even in the West. India has always had a few brahmin householders in villages performing this ritual who are known as Nitya Agnihotrinis and Shrautikas. The ritual is said to cleanse the external and inner spaces of our life on earth. But mere ritualism is not enough. One must understand the significance of the rituals. When H W Bodewitz published this volume in 1976, it received instant admiration. An important work for Vedic studies, it is most welcome to have the present paperback edition for a wider dissemination of its contents.

Eighteen chapters bring us well-chosen excerpts from the Brahmanas and the author insinuates the ritual as an inter-linkage of the *saurāgni* created by Aditya in the beyond with the *agni* lit by man on earth. The twilight language of the ancient sages is not easily decipherable for the modern mind, but Prof. Bodewitz makes a brave attempt and succeeds most of the time, for he has also patiently prepared extensive notes. It is interesting to

note that milk was the usual oblation in such sacrifices, for 'milk is the essence of all plants'.

Though one has to be a close scholar of the subject of Vedic ritualism to understand this work, a little patience can be highly rewarding and help us relate the mental processes of the ancients with the urgent socio-economic life of our society. Thus the *Shatapatha Brahmana* says one should offer increasing amounts as libation to gods, human beings and cattle to indicate the nature of his aspiration. As the percentage stands, gods are fewer than human beings and human beings are fewer than cattle. This proportion should continue for the prosperity of the society. Hence the scripture says: 'He who knowing thus offers the *agnihotra* will have more cattle than (human beings) to be supported by him. For if someone has more cattle than (human beings) to be supported, this means prosperity.' Our ministers of finance and agriculture should take note!

There is then the problem of death. The ancients gave much thought to it. *The Daily Evening and Morning Offering* takes a quick look at the way the *agnihotra* is used in a variety of rituals in the everyday life of the Indian today, culminating in the consigning of the physical remains of a person to the flames. The resilience of this rite, which has lingered so long in the Indian clime and which is now going beyond India too, shows how much aspiration had gone into its creation by the Vedic rishis of old symbolized by *agni* rushing upwards from the head of Prajapati. Prof. Bodewitz has placed plenty of primary sources on a platter for the researcher. It is a spiritual legacy which we must not ignore.

Dr Prema Nandakumar  
Literary Critic  
Srirangam

**Garland of Advaitic Wisdom.** Ajati. Sage Press, Daya Dharmam, ROA Nagar, Tiruvannamalai 606 603. E-mail: [sagepressindia@yahoo.com](mailto:sagepressindia@yahoo.com). 2002. 315 pp. Rs 350.

For more than 4,000 years the Upanishads have directly and indirectly influenced much of the philosophical thought of the world. Swami Vivekananda says of them: 'Therein lies a mine of strength to invigorate the whole world.' With the proliferation of translations of ancient Sanskrit texts in the last one hundred years, there has been a leap in interest in Eastern spirituality, especially Vedanta and Yoga, in the West. This interest, cou-

pled with the lacklustre life that technology is promising and delivering, is drawing more and more people to the deeper dimensions of the Atman.

Advaita Vedanta—call it philosophy, religion, psychology, metaphysics or spirituality—is the highest possible experience a human being can have. A lot of people are curious to understand Advaita philosophy; some sincerely strive for its higher experiences. But Advaita demands years and years of rigorous discipline to prepare oneself for it. It starts with psychological orientation and moulding of the inner world of thought, and it is here that books like this, besides discussions on Advaita, become necessary.

*Garland of Advaitic Wisdom* does not say anything new, does not give fresh doctrinal insights, is not meant to be academic or polemic, nor is it a step-by-step manual of sadhana. It is just as the title suggests: a stringing together of the wisdom connected with Advaitic teachings, while giving a brief outline of the philosophy. Let none hastily conclude that this book has limited use. Advaita has a tremendous charm, especially for the thoughtful. And as the general level of intelligence all over the world is rising, such books will lead many persons to the real portals of this supreme philosophy.

The first section of the book devotes itself to briefly enunciating the evolution of Vedanta and its different schools—ranging from Advaita to the different dualistic schools, its principal doctrines, teachers and the order of Advaita sannyasins. Section Two consists of quotations culled from different scriptures—from the Upanishads to the *Panchadashi*, and including the *prakarana granthas* (monographs) and stotras (hymns). Section Three quotes selectively from Ramana Maharshi, the seer who experienced Advaitic truths and taught them in simple language and eloquent silence. Sections Four and Five give Zen and Tao teachings. Though these philosophies are different from Advaita, yet they are very practical and hence some of the teachings have a special appeal. With a book like this that abounds in technicalities, the Glossary, Sources and Appendices at the end are indispensable. The short Introduction by Swami Shantananda, Ajati's guru, is very lucid. The book is composed in pleasing typeface and printed on good paper. The publisher has spared neither expenses nor pains in producing the book.

Swami Satyamayananda  
Advaita Ashrama



**The R̥gveda: A Brief Study.** Swami Harshananda. Ramakrishna Math, Bull Temple Road, Bangalore 560 019. E-mail: [rkmbblr\\_public@vsnl.net](mailto:rkmbblr_public@vsnl.net). 2003. 38 pp. Rs 12.

The strong and impregnable foundations of Indian culture were laid when the rishis who lived long ago (anytime between 2,500 to 1,200 years BCE) indited the hymns of the Rig Veda. Today we speak with facile ease about our Vedic traditions. But what is this body of Rig Veda, which opens with powerful suktas to Agni, raises high Vishwamitra's mantra—the Gayatri, and concludes with the tremendous hymn calling for universal brotherhood: 'Assemble for a common purpose. Confer together with open minds and hearts. Pool your thoughts for integrated wisdom; for behold, the great gods themselves have come to enjoy their high eminence because of their unity!'

*The R̥gveda* is of course a brief study, but does not leave out any important information regarding the scripture. The date, the manner of dividing the hymns (10,552 mantras in all), the branches (twenty-one, of which only five have survived), the sections (Brahmanas, Aranyakas, Upanishads), the sages who received the mantras (including some thirty women rishis) and the Vedic gods have all been enumerated by Swami Harshananda. He has also touched upon the literary graces found in the Rig Veda. According to him, though various deities are mentioned, in truth they are all addressed to the One Supreme. Temple worship was non-existent. Life on earth was tuned to *ṛta*, the cosmic law and order. The Vedic society did not even dream of moral turpitude: 'An important aspect of life in this world is earning wealth by right means and sharing the good things in life with others, especially the less fortunate ones, through *dāna* or giving gifts' (35).

The chapter titled 'Commentaries' is incomplete. Swami Harshananda rightly begins with Skandaswami and refers to Venkatamadhava, Madhvacharya and Sayana, though one misses Raghavendra's *Mantrartha-manjari*. Whereas he has mentioned the contribution of European scholars like Grassman, Max Muller and Keith to Vedic studies, there is no reference to latter-day Indian commentators on Vedic hymns. Apart from Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Paramasiva Iyer, who have explored some of the *ṛks* departing from the traditional ritualistic interpretation, Sri Aurobindo's

commentaries, *Hymns to the Mystic Fire* (on the Agni Suktas of the Rig Veda) and *On the Veda* (on a selection of hymns from all the Vedas) are well known for their intuitive interpretation. There is then the remarkable Sanskrit commentary *Siddh-anjana* on one hundred and twenty-one hymns of the Rig Veda (the complete first Ashtaka) by Brahmasri T V Kapali Shastri.

Swami Harshananda has shown the green signal. It is for us to take up Vedic studies!

Dr Prema Nandakumar

**Treasury of Spiritual Wisdom.** Andy Zubko. Motilal Banarsidass. 2004. x + 506 pp. Rs 395.

*Treasury of Spiritual Wisdom* is a huge collection of inspiring sayings. It is a unique compilation. It contains quotes of great men from different walks of life—scientists, psychologists, philosophers, and a wide array of spiritual masters from various religious traditions and cultures. Einstein, Heisenberg, Freud, Fromm, Epicurus, Pythagoras, Plato, Thoreau, Russell, Kant, and Tagore speak through its pages as do sages like Buddha, Confucius, Jesus, Muhammad, Shankaracharya, Augustine, Thomas a Kempis, Swami Vivekananda and Ramana Maharshi. The interesting trans-religio-cultural character of this compilation makes not only for a wholesome appreciation of all the great traditions and thought systems, but also helps the reader discover a sublime unity far above the religio-cultural and vocational differences that distinguish these great men. More than anything else, these sayings are *illuminating*.

Interestingly, they concern the practical norms of our day-to-day life as much as high spiritual truths reflecting the deep insights of saints. Numbering 10,000, these inspiring sayings are organized under 142 categories (Adversity, Belief, Character, Death, Prayer and the like) making for easy reference. Human personality matures with the maturity of thought. Any serious reader bringing deep thought to bear upon these sayings can feel their transforming power. It can certainly help the true development of personality.

This beautiful, massive compilation by Andy Zubko is a tribute to seekers all over. It would be a valuable addition to every collection everywhere.

Swami Shuddhidananda  
Advaita Ashrama



## Reports

### New Mission Centre

On 4 July 2005, Srimat Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the newly formed deemed-to-be-university, **Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Educational and Research Institute** (RKMVERI), under the aegis of the Ramakrishna Mission, and gave a benedictory address at a meeting organized on this occasion. Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj and Swami Smarananandaji, Vice President and General Secretary respectively of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, also spoke.



Most Revered President Maharaj releasing the RKMVERI concept paper

Sri Arjun Singh, Union Minister for Human Resource Development, visited Belur Math on 20 July and spoke at a meeting at the Vivekananda Sabhagriha about the newly created university. He also visited **Ramakrishna Mission Swami Vivekananda's Ancestral House and Cultural Centre, Kolkata**.

The Governing Body of the Ramakrishna Mission has decided that the institution, a deemed university under the UGC Act, will be treated as one of its branch centres. Its address is: Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Educational and Research Institute, PO Belur Math,

District Howrah, West Bengal 711 202 (Telefax: 26549999; E-mail: [rkmveri@gmail.com](mailto:rkmveri@gmail.com)). Swami Atmapriyanandaji has been appointed head of the centre.

### News from Branch Centres

Sri Arjun Singh and Sri L K Advani, former Deputy Prime Minister of India, visited **Vivekananda Cultural Centre (Quinton Hall), Shillong**, on 2 June and 4 July respectively and spoke at meetings held in connection with their visits.

Srimat Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj inaugurated the newly built extension to the school run by **Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama, Kalady**, on 22 June.

Srimat Swami Gitanandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the Vivekananda Research Centre at **Swami Vivekananda's Ancestral House** on 4 July.

**Ramakrishna Math, Puri**, conducted a medical camp from 8 to 16 July during Ratha Yatra in which 3,249 patients were treated. The centre also served sherbet to about 11,200 pilgrims. During the festival, **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Puri**, served lemonade to about 14,000 pilgrims and treated 29 patients.

### Foreign News

Sri Bijoy Krishna Handique, Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs and Defence, Government of India, along with four MPs of the Indian Parliament, visited **Ramakrishna Mission, Dhaka**, on 9 July.

### Gujarat Flood Relief

In the wake of the recent devastating floods in Gujarat, our centres in Limbdi, Rajkot and Vadodara immediately launched extensive relief operations in Ahmedabad, Amreli, Anand, Junagadh, Kheda, Rajkot,

Surendranagar and Vadodara districts.

**Ramakrishna Mission, Limbdi**, distributed 300 kg wheat flour, 1,206 kg rice, 906 kg dal, 2,412 kg potatoes and onions, and 300 kg edible oil to 532 families at more than 10 locations in Surendranagar district.

**Ramakrishna Ashrama, Rajkot**, distributed 95,401 food packets (each containing 150 g *gathia*, 150 g sweets and 100 g biscuits), 7,462 relief packets (each containing 2 kg khichri, 5 kg wheat flour, 5 kg potatoes, 500 g edible oil, 1 kg salt, 100 g chilli powder, 100 g spices, 100 g tea powder, 500 g sugar, 1 sari, 1 blanket, 6 candles and 1 matchbox) and 11,150 water pouches to 95,401 persons at 121 villages in Ahmedabad, Amreli, Anand, Junagadh, Kheda and Rajkot districts. Apart from this, the centre gave 7,020 food packets to the Rajkot district collector for distribution in inaccessible areas by helicopter. It also distributed 2 trolleys of dry fodder and 12 metric tons of green fodder for cattle.

**Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Memorial, Vadodara**, distributed 38,020 food packets (each containing *gathia*, *bundi*, biscuits, and potato and banana chips), 1,000 grocery packets, (each containing 10 kg wheat flour, 5 kg rice, 2 kg dal, 1 kg oil, 1 kg salt, 50 g turmeric powder, 50 g tea powder and 1 kg sugar), 68 utensil sets (each set including 4 cooking vessels, 4 dishes, 4 bowls, 2 tumblers, 1 spoon, 1 frying pan and 1 spatula), 14,500 water pouches, 300 chlorine tablets, 1,625 blankets and 125 tarpaulin sheets to 97,873

persons at 12 places in Vadodara city and 9 villages in Vadodara and Anand districts. Besides, 1,763 persons were given medical relief.

*The Ramakrishna Mission appeals to one and all to contribute generously to the Gujarat flood relief fund. All donations made in cash or by cheque/ demand draft drawn in favour of 'Ramakrishna Mission' payable in Kolkata are exempt from income tax under Section 80G of the Income Tax Act.*

### Relief and Rehabilitation

**Ramakrishna Math, Chennai**, distributed 7,500 kg rice and 17,692 shirts to tsunami-affected people in Kanchipuram and Kanyakumari districts in June 2005.

In June and July, **Ramakrishna Mission, Port Blair**, distributed 1,414 saris, 180 women's garments, 1,050 dhotis, 4,429 shirts, 225 children's garments, 175 vests and 325 bed sheets to tsunami victims at different places in and around Port Blair.

**Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Malda**, distributed 100 kg *chira*, 63 dhotis, 24 kg biscuits, 11 kg nutritional food supplements, 27 kg gur, 88 saris, 94 children's garments and 294 corrugated iron sheets to 39 families in Bhutni whose houses were destroyed by fire, in June.

**Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama, Kaldy**, gave 33 catamarans benefiting 65 families of Edamanakkad village in Ernakulam district in June.

In June, the Batticaloa sub-centre of **Ramakrishna Mission, Colombo**, donated a 15-seater passenger vessel to tsunami-affected people in Batticaloa.

In June and July, **Ramakrishna Mission Calcutta Students' Home, Belgharia**, provided building materials for 48 more houses to people rendered homeless by the storm that hit Nadia and North 24-Parganas in May.

**Ramakrishna Math, Pune**, distributed 400 kg *chanachur*, 200 kg bread and butter, 9,600 bananas and 1,000 l drinking water to 500 families of 2 villages of Raigad district that were badly affected by floods, in July. ~



Distribution of relief kits by the Vadodara centre